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# **INHABITING IMAGES:**

## **Ju|'hoansi, San, and Others**

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-2017-



# DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

Aglaja Agascha Kempinski

November 2017,

Edinburgh, UK





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# THESIS ABSTRACT

The Kalahari San or Bushmen are one of the most researched ethnic groups. As such, multiple images, produced by research, popular literature and films exist of them. Tsumkwe, the administrative centre of what used to be known as ‘Bushmanland’ during Apartheid, occupies a special place in the context of San image production as it is the site of most visual material produced about San, a popular destination for tourists who want to see San and a successful indigenous governed conservancy that attracts many NGOs and other projects aimed at San. The people living in Tsumkwe are the Ju|’hoansi, a group considered to be part of the ‘San’ category. This thesis considers ethnographic questions about the Ju|’hoansi and those who visit them, through a framework based on the theory of images.

**How do the Ju|’hoansi inhabit the multiple images of San-ness which non-San bring to Tsumkwe and how do they navigate the pressures of both San sociality and expectations from outsiders within and outside the structures of knowledge which shape our perception of these images?**

In addition to general participant observation in Tsumkwe and the surrounding Nyae Nyae conservancy, I make use of ethnographic data from filmmaking workshops I conducted with Ju|’hoan participants. These workshops created important primary data. Further, by inverting the hitherto passive relationship to film into an active one, the engagement with the medium and its production enabled usually invisible concepts and understanding of self and others to become articulated. Additionally, I conducted interviews with tourists, researchers and NGO workers.

As Gordon discusses in *The Bushman Myth*, the label of San or Bushmen is an externally invented and constructed category. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a multitude of images of the San have emerged, ranging from ‘underdeveloped primitives’, to no ‘noble savages’ to ‘disempowered minorities’. However outdated, once articulated, remnants of these images have remained and contribute to the body of preconceived ideas outsiders approach the San with.

In Tsumkwe, different images exist simultaneously. In interactions with outsiders, Ju|'hoansi informants confirmed and enacted sometimes opposing images, depending on the context, without considering one more 'true' than another. Some Ju|'hoansi were able to switch between different images particularly well.

Despite of the Ju|'hoansi community in Tsumkwe being accepting of the various images of San-ness brought in by outsiders, Tsumkwe was overall governed by Ju|'hoan values and sociality which stopped any of the NGOs that tried to establish themselves and their world views in Tsumkwe from becoming too dominant.

Egalitarian pressures, however, also affect not only outsiders seeking to establish themselves but also Ju|'hoansi. Additionally, many Ju|'hoansi, experience the multitude of images brought in as a pressure. This double pressure can be somewhat relieved through carefully negotiated play in which caricatures of identities are acted out playfully.

Despite possible overlap between San images and Ju|'hoan sociality, it is useful to understand San images as being a reflection on those who construct them. For the Ju|'hoansi, these images are part of the world they inhabit creatively.



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

*The difference between you and me is that I live here. Even if you come many times and you stay many years, you always have somewhere else to go back to. You are always a visitor. Me, this is where I am, not where I go.*

(Joel/ |Ui)

There is an inherent problem with San studies. The people being studied, the people which the term San, or Bushmen, seeks to describe, do not themselves have a word for the category “San”. Individual groups of people who are generally identified as San do have their own distinct labels for themselves, but they do not have a term for the general category. The Ju|’hoan-speaking people living in Nyae Nyae, for instance, know themselves as Ju|’hoansi, their neighbours know themselves as !Kung<sup>1</sup>, and so on. So, how can we study a group of people who do not understand themselves as a group?

Of course, anthropologists typically study individual groups and talk about them specifically, but the category of San is still widely used. A century of scholarly work, deeply embedded in the genesis of anthropology as well as popular literature, has led to ‘San’ or ‘Bushman’ being an easily recognised term, with powerful images attached to it.

As such, while the category of San does not represent a self-identified group of people, there are nonetheless people who have learned to apply this category to themselves and who inhabit the images associated with the term.

In the context of San image construction, Tsumkwe, a city (by administrative label) in the Nyae Nyae region, Namibia, occupies a special place. When Namibia, as South-West Africa, was run by South Africa during Apartheid, Tsumkwe was the administrative centre of Bushmanland, the designated area for those identified as San or Bushmen. Today, the surrounding area has become the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, an indigenous-run conservation area which generates income through a variety of strategies, including

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<sup>1</sup> The term !Kung is somewhat ambiguous. Anthropologists used to use this term to describe Ju|’hoansi, and there is scope to argue that !Kung is a more general term than Ju|’hoansi. However, people in Nyae Nyae describe themselves distinctly as Ju|’hoansi and their neighbours as !Kung.

tourism and trophy hunting. Here, hunting is permitted so long as it is done traditionally. Tsumkwe also attracts NGOs of all scopes and sizes – all with the expressed mission of helping the San. Further, Nyae Nyae is the setting of the majority of films made about San, most notably John Marshall's *The Hunters* (1957) and comedic feature film *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1980). Finally, Tsumkwe is a popular destination for tourists interested in learning more about traditional San life.

The people living in Tsumkwe and labelled San or Bushmen by their government, anthropologists and many other visitors, call themselves Ju|'hoansi. Their lives in Tsumkwe are deeply impacted by the images of San-ness that are brought to and produced in Tsumkwe. This thesis asks:

**How do the Ju|'hoansi inhabit the multiple images of San-ness which non-San bring to Tsumkwe and how do they navigate the pressures of both San sociality and expectations from outsiders within and outside the structures of knowledge which shape our perception of these images?**

In finding an answer to these questions, I explicitly use theories of images to construct my framework, rather than just staying within the terms of previous debates about San. I argue that Tsumkwe is both a place of San image production where multiple truths exist simultaneously, creatively re-produced in a manner that resists pinning 'San' down in one coherent, dominant image *and* a place of Ju|'hoan sociality where values of egalitarianism govern how these images can be inhabited. As such, my thesis makes a contribution to San literature in general, ethnographies of Tsumkwe in particular, and presents an approach to how images and the imagination can be incorporated into the understanding of an anthropological field site.

## Who

In recent years, the word San has replaced the word Bushmen in public discourse in Namibia. According to Widlok, the governmental shift from 'Bushman' to 'San' was "an attempt of the new government to stand out against the pre-independence discourse that had created an anti-SWAPO and pro-South African profile of Bushmen" (2000, p. 363). Particularly in government circles, the term *Bushman* is often seen as defamatory and

deeply associated with their status as ‘barely human’ attributed to them during colonial times. As Frank<sup>2</sup>, a member of the Namibian parliament put in an interview with me:

*‘Bushmen’ is what the white settlers called them. It is disrespectful. If we call them Bushmen we are saying ‘we still see you the same way as those White settlers a hundred years ago who killed you and hunted you.’*

There is no doubt that the origin of the word Bushmen is ostensibly problematic. It is externally defined, in a language foreign to those who are being labelled as Bushmen, it is based on the superficial description that these people live in ‘the Bush’, and, as Gordon has shown (Gordon & Sholto-Douglas, 2000), it has been used to designate San as a political underclass. On the other hand, the word *San*, when looked at etymologically, is not much better. Like ‘Bushmen’, ‘San’ was originally a defamatory label, applied by pastoralists neighbours. ‘San’, translated from Nama, refers to the people who “pick food off the ground” and became associated with people who steal cattle.

There has been much debate among anthropologists as to whether to refer to the people in question as Bushmen or San. Hitchcock et al. (2006: 4-6) provide emic perspectives from people of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, the area this thesis is concerned with. However, as Robert Gordon rightly points out, the real problem with regards to what to call the indigenous hunter-gatherer societies in Southern Africa is not so much the actual label, but the category it seeks to describe. Gordon argues that

The term Bushmen was a ‘lumpen category’ into which all who failed to conform or acquiesce were dumped. It was not an ethnic group but a socio-political category derived from the wider setting. (Gordon & Sholto-Douglas, 2000, p. 6)

I will go more deeply into the history of San identity construction in Chapter Two. The important point here is that both the term ‘Bushman’ and the term ‘San’ describe invented, externally constructed categories. They are not based on an emic category shared by the people it describes. While people do refer to themselves as San or Bushmen in conversation with non-San others, there is no word in Ju|’hoan which describes the same group. Furthermore, it is not entirely clear who belongs under this umbrella term and what those people share. While Richard Lee describes the “San [as] the hunting and

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymised.

gathering people of Southern Africa” in his comprehensive edited volume entitled *Kalahari Hunter Gatherers* (1976, p. 5), other San scholars, such as Alan Barnard (2008), do not see the divide between pastoralists and hunter-gatherers as clear-cut and all-defining.

Nonetheless, I have to somehow refer to the people whom I talk about and cite in this thesis. A sensible approach, suggested by Wilmsen (1989) is to call people by the name they use to refer to their own, particular group. I follow his advice wherever I can. Thus, when I refer directly to the people living in Tsumkwe and the surrounding Nyae Nyae region, I speak of the Ju|’hoansi.

However, since part of my particular focus is also how Namibian hunter-gatherers are imagined, I also use the terms Bushmen and San. As a general rule, when discussing the way interlocutors speak, or authors write about them, I use whichever term the speaker or author uses. When I refer to generally held beliefs and images, such as the notion of the noble hunter-gather who lives in tune with nature, I use the term San since it is currently favoured by the Namibian Government.

While I made an effort to speak to Ju|’hoansi of all backgrounds, circumstances and occupations in Tsumkwe, I was particularly interested in those individuals who actively participated in events of San image making and interactions with outsiders. Later on in this thesis I come to speak of these gatekeeping or creative individuals as ‘Tricksters’.

The Ju|’hoansi, however, are only one half of the subject of this thesis. I am equally interested in non-San, who come to Tsumkwe and Nyae Nyae because of the San, such as researchers, tourists, and NGO workers. I hesitate to draw a line between those identifying as San and those coming in search of San. This distinction is not meant to mark Ju|’hoansi out as intrinsically different. In fact, I found that Ju|’hoansi are often subject to a sense of nostalgia for the ‘the old days’ similar to the set of desires that motivates non-San to come to Tsumkwe. However, the particular set of relationships I am interested in, which occur around San image making, put one set of people in the role of non-San – those who are enquiring, observing, and judging – and one set of people in the role of San – those who are being enquired about, being observed, and being judged. This does not mean that the Ju|’hoansi are always passive in the construction of San image, quite the contrary. However, whether one is or is not San is the most elemental building block to interactions in Tsumkwe.

I refer to this group of people sometimes as non-San, and sometimes as outsiders. However, this group is anything but coherent. Subcategories of non-San include tourists, researchers, NGO workers, and government employees. Neither of these subcategories is homogenous in itself. Tourists come both from abroad and Namibia and South Africa. Some of them travel with tour busses and some individually. Some of them only come to relax, and others consider themselves spiritual travellers. They come from a variety of backgrounds with a variety of different views about the San, although, it should be pointed out, a majority of them come from a European-American middle class background. NGO workers are similarly diverse, ranging from highly educated, well-paid employees of established NGOs to individuals who arrive with little more than the desire to help. Government officials were largely from Black Namibian<sup>3</sup> backgrounds. Finally, researchers are not limited to anthropologists but include geologists, archaeologists and people simply researching for their own personal interest.

## What: The Kalahari Debate, Images, and Archives

Any work relating to people identified as San has to somewhat position itself in the ‘Great Kalahari Debate’. This debate erupted in the early 90s, and pitched ‘traditionalists’ against ‘revisionists’, arguing over, in simplified terms, whether the San can be considered as isolated hunter-gatherers or whether their life is a product of having been marginalised by both Bantu and White settlers. I write about the Kalahari Debate in Chapter Two with regards to effects this scholarly debate has had on San images. It is worth, however, pointing out where my thesis stands on this question.

In a paper from 1990, Solway and Lee, two proponents of the traditionalist side of the debate published a paper which sought to clarify their position, arguing that across the various groups considered to be San, some can be thought of as more isolated than others, but all of them do have histories.

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<sup>3</sup> Black Namibian as a category does not include San in local usage. Black and San are different categories.

In a comment on the same paper, Harpending and Draper summarise the debate in a way I entirely agree with:

We find the discussion here agreeable and we find the papers of the revisionists agreeable, but the underlying debate is like shadow without subject. Of course the San are not timeless relics, but it is equally absurd to say that practices like food sharing represent a subliminal consensus about how to avoid outside domination. (Harpending and Draper in Solway, et al., 1990, p. 127)

My research speaks to both sides of this debate. Like the revisionists, I emphasise interaction with non-San. In fact, my entire research question is based on ‘outside’ influences. Like Wilmsen, I believe that San groups should be referred to by their own individual name, rather than by a term given to them by outsiders. Further, my research could be seen to fill a gap in the revisionist project: while the Ju|’hoansi of Nyae Nyae are arguably one of the most researched San groups (Solway, et al., 1990, p. 115), Tsumkwe has not been the subject of much anthropological research about interactions between San and non-San. In fact, an edited volume titled *San and the State*, which explicitly sets out to move beyond the Kalahari Debate (Hohmann, et al., 2003, p. 209), does not include a chapter on the Nyae Naye conservancy, even though it does mention the neighbouring N#a-Jaqua Conservancy.

However, my research also speaks to the traditionalist side of the argument; specifically, a point made by Lee and Guenther:

A generation of historically oriented scholars of Africa (e.g., Worsley 1952, Gough 1971, Gordon 1984) have been justly critical of the anthropological penchant for idealizing the “primitive other”, for presenting societies as more bounded and isolated than they are. We wonder if we are not falling into another equally pernicious distortion, **an enchantment of some scholars with the powers of advancing capital and a belief in its ability to transform and destroy everything in its path** (Lee & Guenter, 1993, p. 223, my emphasis)

My thesis emphasises Ju|’hoan sociality. In particular, Chapter Six argues that while NGOs bring their own, mostly European-American, systems of hierarchical worldviews to Tsumkwe, they are ultimately either repelled by or bound into a space that is governed by Ju|’hoan values and methods of conflict resolution. Overall, while much of the thesis

looks at the images and ideas non-San bring with them, I explore how those ideas unfold in the distinctly Ju|'hoan space that Tsumkwe is.

Ultimately, while the Kalahari debate has been able to flesh out important points about how anthropology has approached the subject of San studies, I do not believe that these viewpoints should be understood as binary opposites. While it is important to avoid the trap of idealising or essentialising 'San' culture or deny outside influences, it is equally important not to blindly assume that the presence of outsiders implies a sweeping and homogenous transformation of all San communities. As Sylvain points out (Sylvain, 2003, p. 113), making a binary distinction between 'disempowered underclass' and 'indigeneity' either denies poor people their culture or isolates indigenous people from class issues.

There is a body of San literature, which, along similar lines as the argument above, seeks to come to terms with the demands of the Kalahari debate by looking for the traditional in the modern. Robins, in fact, coined the term 'traditional modernities' in his work on how San are using modern technology, such as quad bikes and guns, within 'traditional' life styles (Robins, 2003). Similarly, Guenther (2003) and Sylvain (2002, 2003) have looked at how San have maintained and adapted traditional rituals and beliefs while working on farms or being otherwise restricted by socio-economic circumstances. As Gordon (1992), Guenther (2003) and others have illustrated, San are often discriminated against in everyday life by Black and White communities alike, resulting in restrictions on their scope of occupational or educational paths. Such studies are thus not only anthropologically relevant but also politically important inquiries into issues of social justice. My thesis, on the other hand, looks at a situation where San-ness is an asset which draws outsiders to Tsumkwe and which the Ju|'hoansi are able to commodify.

## IMAGES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

In their comment on Solway and Lee's paper on the Kalahari Debate, Harpending and Draper continue:

The real argument seems to be about the correct image to be projected, or about what Anthropologists should tell science writers. (Harpending and Draper in Solway, et al., 1990, p. 127)



The focus and framework of my thesis, rather than any argument strictly pertaining to the Kalahari Debate, are these images that are being fought over - both within scholarly work and other contexts, such as tourism and development work. However, 'images of San', in the sense of the contested notions of who they are, have been studied before. Alan Barnard's work (2007), for instance, provides a comprehensive history of how anthropological perspectives on the San have shifted. Rather than adding to any index of San images, or to revise particular images, as for example Robert Gordon does in *The Bushman Myth*, this thesis understands this contestation to be embedded in the experience of the Ju/'hoansi and non-San it studies. Ironically, whether this is my expressed aim or not, my research cannot help but add to the 'archive of San images' - a notion which will be of central importance throughout this thesis. However, it is worth pointing out that my goal is not just to revise or add to existing San images but to make the 'image' the focal point of my understanding of the field site and framework of this thesis, as well as my methodology.

While images, as I will show below, are neither exclusively visual, nor necessarily need 'the visual', visibility is deeply connected with images - even those that might otherwise be described as notions or ideas - and lends itself to a starting point for exploring the complexity of images. Mitchell considers images as elements in the process of creating reality. While images combined with objects make pictures, pictures are "ways of worldmaking" (Nelson Goodman, cited in Mitchell, 2005, p. xv). Mitchell argues that

pictures, including world pictures, have always been with us and there is no getting beyond pictures, much less world pictures, to a more authentic relationship with Being, with the Real, or with the world (Mitchell, 2005, p. xiv)

The above quote reflects how I intuitively understand the relationship between San images and the people in Tsumkwe. I do not consider San images as being either authentic or inauthentic but rather as components in the act of creating truths. I understand Tsumkwe and the Nyae Naye conservancy to be in a process of worldmaking where various and sometimes contradictory images are being creatively navigated, created, and re-created. However, out of context the above definition provides little clarity. In one fell swoop I have conflated images with pictures, 'being', the 'real' and the world in general. It is therefore necessary to take a step back to see how, anthropologically, we can talk about images and what purpose they serve in this thesis.

Scholars of images and/or “visual cultural forms” (Banks & Murphy, 1997, p. 5) – another set of terms which this section will show should not be unreflexively conflated – often point towards what they consider a reluctance of anthropology as a discipline to fully engage with or make use of visual materials. Lucien Taylor (1996), for instance, critiques a widespread distrust in film among anthropologists by responding to quotations from anthropologists Baxter, Bloch, and Hastrup, who each in some way express the view that film is an incompatible and inadequate tool for anthropology. Before framing their rejection of film as a ‘fear of the image’ – an important notion which we will return to further below – Taylor shows that rather than being ‘flat’ and ‘imposing’, film might equally be understood as complex and open-ended.

There is “a curious paradox” at play when it comes to anthropology and the visual, argues Anna Grimshaw (2001, p. 5). On the one hand, ‘seeing’ is an implicit part of the ethnographic method and of ethnographic writing. Written ethnographies reproduce what the anthropologist has seen and evoke it in the mind of the reader. On the other hand, anthropology has had a tendency to reject the visual (ibid.). Grimshaw argues that anthropology’s anxiety about the visual stems precisely from their interconnectedness:

I discovered that I had also absorbed from my teachers, trained as they were in the classic structural-functionalism of the British school, a profound scepticism of visual anthropology as about photography, art and material culture. These were **the tangible links to a Victorian past from which modern ethnographers were so anxious to separate themselves**” (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 4)

Indeed, some of the visual anthropology in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century “involved using photography as part of the objectifying gaze of the colonial project” (Pink, 2007, p. 7), an argument which is made particularly well by Elizabeth Edwards (1992). Of course, any context where power is systematically held and enacted over others is likely to make use of the visual since it is through images that we *make* others. “The visible emphasises what one is not”, says MacDougall (2006, p. 215), striking at the core of the subject of my second chapter, *Image Ruins*. Even if, as Grimshaw argues, anthropology is sceptical of images because it wants to evolve beyond its colonial roots, it is precisely an entanglement of image-making, knowledge-production, anthropology and colonialism which have made Tsumkwe what it is today and has created the socio-economic environment in which the

Ju/'hoansi now find themselves. For this reason alone, a focus on images would be justified and important.

But anthropology and images have more to offer each other than reflection over past sins and more in common than just a colonial past. In fact, when Grimshaw argues that the process of seeing forms the basis of ethnographic practice, she also shows that “the ethnographer’s eye is always partial” (2001, p. 8). Because the way in which we look at the world determines what we can say about it, the history of anthropology and the history of the visual are deeply interlinked (ibid.)

The question as to where exactly in the anthropological project the visual should be situated still remains, although since Lucien Taylor’s scathing critique in 1996, there has arguably been much progress. In their book *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, in 1997, Banks and Morphy advocate “the anthropology of visual systems, or, more broadly, visible cultural forms” (p. 5). Typically, visual anthropology is thought of as either the study of visual cultural forms or using visual methods to convey anthropological content (MacDougall, 2006, p. 217). However, MacDougall insists that visual anthropology is not actually about “the visual per se but about a range of culturally inflected relationships enmeshed and encoded in the visual” (2006, p. 221). Still, once we talk about images, rather than ‘just’ visual forms, it might feel like we need to traverse some of the boundaries set for visual anthropology. Grimshaw argues, by reflecting on “Henrietta Moore’s vision of a genuinely feminist anthropology” (2001, p. 173), that the way to do justice to images is not simply by adding them to academic projects “but is instead about confronting the conceptual and analytical inadequacies of disciplinary theory” (Moore, 1988, p. 4). For the remainder of this section, I am going to lay out the theoretical tools which I find most useful for my analysis and understanding of the image, relying particularly on Mitchell, Belting, Grimshaw, and MacDougall.

#### WHAT AND HOW ARE IMAGES?

So, having touched on anthropology’s relationship with the visual I still have not clarified what I mean by ‘images’. As Belting suggests in *Image Anthropology*, a lack of clarification is a common feature of discussions that touch upon the visual and pictures and are the result of a “confusion that is merely glossed over by the word ‘image’ (2011 [2001], p. 9). Images seem to occupy a curious position:

we understand an image to be neither a simple object (a photographic print for example) nor a real body (the body of the loved one in the photograph) (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 5)

Occupying a curious relational position, defining the scope of images – or at least how I understand it for the purpose of this thesis – is not straightforward. To Mitchell, images are elements which, combined with objects, make up pictures. Pictures are, in a way, manifestations of images; they are, in the words of Mitchell:

...in the assemblage of fleeting, evanescent shadows and material supports that constitute the cinema as a “picture show”; in the stationing of a piece of sculpture on a specific site; in a caricature or stereotype realized in a pattern of human behaviour, “pictures in the mind”, the imagination or memory of an embodied consciousness. (Mitchell, 2005, pp. xiii-xiv)

Pictures, then, are anything that can be seen or concretely imagined (forming “pictures in the mind”). Anything related to this broad definition of pictures is necessarily also affected by images. However, even though they may be a component of pictures, and live in pictures, images are not bounded by pictures. To see how this applies to my thesis and focus on San Images, it is necessary look more closely at how images relate to pictures, words, mediums and bodies.

Despite often being considered opposites, competing or incompatibly different (as Taylor shows), images and words are deeply interconnected and interdependent. Words might, for example, evoke certain images and prompt pictures in the mind:

the image is not exclusive to the visible. There is visibility that does not amount to an image; there are images which consist wholly in words.” (Rancière, 2003, p. 7).

On the other hand, as Rancière argues, “words make seen what does not pertain to the visible, by reinforcing, attenuating, or dissimulating the expression of an idea.” (Rancière, 2003, p.3). For my thesis, the interconnectedness between the visual and words in creating images means two things. Firstly, it is important to be aware that it is not only visual artists such as filmmakers and photographers that have shaped the image of San but that writings, anthropological or otherwise, played - and continue to play - their part. Chapter Two, *Image Ruins*, will consider both textual and visual manifestations of changing San

images. Secondly, the relationship between words and pictures will form an important part of my consideration of records and archives in Chapter Four, *The Pre-Archive*, which establishes my framework of understanding Tsumkwe as a space of image production.

“Language and imagery continually contaminate one another”, Taylor says. But even though they are interdependent, they are also fundamentally different. To decode images and visuals by the same logic as words, to assume that there is something comparable to a grammar of images, even though often attempted by semioticians, is prone to create a blind spot for what images can really do. Cryptically, Taylor says of film – which I believe can be extended to images – that it is “a language and not a language” (1996, p. 85). Slightly more clearly, MacDougall argues “Images reflect thought, and they may lead to thought, but they are much more than thought” (2006, p. 1) and continues:

We are accustomed to regarding thought as something resembling language [...]  
But our conscious experience involves much more than this kind of thought. It is made up of ideas, sensory responses, and the pictures of our imagination. The way we use words all too often becomes a mistaken recipe for how to make, use, and understand visual images. By treating images – in paintings, photographs and films – as a product of language, or even a language in themselves, we ally them to a concept of thought that neglects many of the ways in which they create our own knowledge (MacDougall, 2006, pp. 1-2)

Here, we may begin to understand images as inseparably bound up with knowledge and experience. As Belting puts it:

an ‘image’ is more than a product of perception. It is created as the result of personal or collective knowledge and intention. **We live with images, we comprehend the world in images** (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 9)

My thesis confirms Belting’s argument. It is images of San which shape the experience of the Ju|’hoansi and their non-San visitors in Tsumkwe. Without the various images of, and attached to, the notion of San and Bushmen, as I show throughout this thesis, Tsumkwe would not be what it is.

The above quotes not only argue that images are different from, or go beyond, textual thought and language, but also hints at *how* they are different. If images are part of a sensory way of experiencing the world, we might be able to think of them as a way of knowing more primal than language. Grimshaw’s (2001) argument about vision being an

ethnographic technique we cannot help but employ might certainly make us think so; MacDougall says that images “are what we know, or have known, prior to any comparison, judgement, or explanation” (2006, p.5) and that “filming, unlike writing, precedes thinking” (2006, p.7). Certainly, thinking of images as prior to language is tempting. However, thinking of one as being prior to the other risks putting them into artificial hierarchies of value. Suggesting that images somehow mature into language would be, as Belting puts it, akin to celebrating “history as progress from magical to rational attitude” (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 16).

The reason I mention images being considered more primal than words is two-fold. Firstly, my thesis, in agreement with Belting’s stance above, explicitly argues against any notion that consider images a less evolved precursor to and separate from text. Particularly in Chapter Five, *Trickstering*, I show that the Ju|’hoansi – just as I suspect most other people – make use of logic that would normally be associated with language (such as being linear or following rules of non-contradiction) as well as logic based on images (which, as I will show, tends to be associated with multiplicity rather than linearity). Secondly, however, the political reality of people identified as San is that often they are associated with a more primal state of being, partly because of their lack of their own written records. This is bound up in a more general tendency to associate visuality with primitive culture (Taussig, 2009, p. 9). However, I agree with Mitchell when he says: “I believe that magical attitudes towards images are just as powerful in the modern world as they were in so-called ages of faith.” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 8). In fact, my thesis shows that San and non-San alike are susceptible to the magical power of images. Despite negative implications for how the Ju|’hoansi are seen, it is precisely the ‘magical’ qualities of powerful images of primal selves and origin which draws outsiders to Tsumkwe (see Chapter Four, *The Pre-Archive*, and Chapter Six, *Inside*).

However, having established that images are different from words, it is important to also discuss how they are different or more than pictures. “It may live in a work of art,” argues MacDougall, “but the image does not necessarily coincide with the work of art” (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 2). To de-mystify this point, Belting’s argument about iconoclasm is useful:

iconoclasm, which is violence against images, only succeeds in destroying the medium or medium-support of an image.... It leaves untouched the image itself, for the image remains with the viewer” (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 5)

In *Image Ruins* I explicitly show how images, although presumably having long served their purpose and no longer being purposefully reproduced and manifested in pictures and other visual forms, can continue to resurface. Here, I somewhat argue against Belting’s point that “societies discard images that they have invented themselves as soon as they no longer do their intended service” (2011 [2001], p. 10). Instead, I suggest that the process of images ‘disappearing’ is complex and one cannot assume to predict which images believed long gone might randomly resurface.

Belting provides us with a useful formula of what images consist of. Even though they are not media, he argues, images do have a “need of and use for” media (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 5). This intuitively makes sense. In order for images to be seen they need a medium to render them visible. However, just like images and pictures and images and words, the two cannot easily be separated (see for instance Belting, 2011 [2001] pp. 15 and 36).

Importantly, the image requires a further element:

we must address the image not only as a product of a given medium... but also as a product of ourselves, for we generate images of our own (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 2)

The body is part of the image in two ways; both in their ‘fabrication’ and their ‘perception’ (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 3). This brings us back to the notion that through ‘seeing’ the image becomes part of our very experience. “By looking at something, we might even pass into the image” says Taussig (2009, p.6) and “Seeing not only makes us alive to the experience of things but to being itself”, MacDougall puts it (2006, p. 1).

‘Seeing’ and ‘images’ may connect us to our experience, but what we *can* see is limited. “We see what we want to see, and what we want to see is determined [...] by the desire to construct a credible world” (Read, 1991), quoted in Grimshaw, 2001, p.8). So, there is something or some process which sorts images into conceivable relationships. Both MacDougall and Belting talk about this via ‘meaning’. “The image is defined by its meaning” Belting states (2011 [2001], p. 9). Or, in MacDougall’s words:

Meaning guides our seeing. Meaning allows us to categorise objects. Meaning is what imbues the image of a person with all we know about them (2006, p. 1)

Grimshaw, on the other hand speaks about knowledge:

vision functions as a metaphor for knowledge, for particular ways of knowing the world. (2001, p. 7)

## INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF IMAGE ARCHIVES

Boundaries of the conceivable and contestations over which images are the ‘right’, are at the heart of the environment within which the Ju|’hoansi who interact with outsiders find themselves. I talk about these structures of San images as ‘archives’, particularly in Chapter Four where I complicate the Derridian notion of the archive and adapt it to the specific circumstances of knowledge production in Tsumkwe. If the Kalahari Debate is really about which image of the San to present to the public, we may think of it as a war over how to organise and structure a particular archive.

However, the way in which archives of meaning, images and knowledge are woven together into everyday life in Tsumke is a constant interplay between the public and the private, the generalised and the specific, between individual bodies (as producers and perceivers of images) and the archive.

Public images have always controlled personal imagination; and the personal imagination, in turn, either cooperates with them or resists them (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 15)

Archives of meaning and images, thus, are not static. The element of personal experience, of how each manifestation of the image turns out matters. What we see is organised,

But whatever our culture, we also see to some extent literally [...] Meaning shapes perception, but in the end perception can refigure meaning” (MacDougall, 2006, p. 2)

To do justice to this fluidity of meaning, I end up talking about what I call the ‘Pre-Archive’ in reference to Tsumkwe. Images and visual representations are the substance of interactions in Tsumkwe. People come to Nyae Nyae because of pre-existing images they have of the San; the Ju|’hoansi confirm or amend these images through performances,



filmmakers produce and reproduce images of San-ness and so do researchers, and finally, in the context of my fieldwork, Ju|'hoansi are appropriating mediums of image making by producing films themselves. However, the product of how these images are inhabited by the Ju|'hoansi does not lead to one overarching archive of truth, but rather to a state where multiple truths exist alongside and sometimes in contradiction with one another, kept alive through ongoing manifestations of their images. Taussig argues - in talking about colour needing to be framed, so as not to pollute civilised life - that to force the affective power of visibility into structures is a symptom of thinking of oneself as civilised. When I argue that the Ju|'hoansi are better able to exist without such rigid structures (in Chapter Four and Five) I do not in any way mean to link this to any narrative of primitivism. Rather, I would like to suggest that an overreliance on such structures on behalf of non-San studying the Ju|'hoansi might be to blame for some of the narratives and images produced about them.

Here, I want to take a brief moment and mention some other terms connected to the notion of image archives and pre-archives which are important for this thesis. When we speak about images and bodies, we are also speaking of the imagination. Crapanzano's *Imaginative Horizons* is helpful here. Crapanzano points to the blurry divide between our imagination and the here and now. His "concern is with openness and closure, with the way in which we construct, wittingly or unwittingly, horizons that determine what we experience and how we interpret what we experience" (Crapanzano, 2004, p. 2). While I do not refer to his work directly in the main body of this thesis, Crapanzano's way of picturing the act of imagining is useful in giving nuance to Tsumkwe as a place of imagination and image construction.

Crapanzano uses the term of the 'hinterland' as a way of talking about the imagination as a space beyond, a space of remoteness. While Tsumkwe and the Nyae Nyae Conservancy are actual geographical locations, they are pictured and thought about by outsiders as 'remote' - a quality which relates them to the imagination and a landscape of powerful images.

In visual representations this is often emphasised by zooming into the Nyae Nyae region from an overview of the continent of Africa. A prime example of this is the opening of *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. This remoteness, which I elaborate on in Chapter Three, is important because to many of the people who come to Tsumkwe, it acts as an antipode to

what they consider their normal life. As I discuss in Chapter Six, for instance, NGO workers are attracted to Tsumkwe not only because it is geographically remote, but also because the San, imagined as Stone Age remnants, are socially so far removed from their own experience. It is worth asking, whether this remoteness is part of what makes Tsumkwe such a fertile ground for the imagination (Chapter Four).

In light of understanding Tsumkwe as this space of imagination and image construction It is worth pointing out how I use ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ in this thesis. Any discussion of these terms brings to mind Barth’s work on ethnic boundaries:

categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories. (Barth, 1969, p. 9)

Barth’s work on how ethnic identity is maintained not through cultural isolation but through boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and “can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence” (ibid.) is useful for understanding that Ju|’hoansi sociality can indeed endure in the face of ongoing interactions with international NGOs. When I use the term ‘outsiders’, as in non-San, I do indeed refer to people who are not considered part of the category of ‘Ju|’hoansi’. There was however, no ambiguity over who was Ju|’hoan and who was not in my fieldwork and thus I do not focus on this kind of inside and outside.

The inside and outside I am concerned with in Chapters Six and Seven refers to Tsumkwe as a complex space of image construction. Inside this space, which is occupied by both Ju|’hoansi and non-San, the way in which San images are performed and interpreted is embedded in a variety of social pressures and expectations. Outside refers to a space where these images can be experimented with and where images are not taken seriously. I explore this specifically in Chapter Seven, where I discuss how Ju|’hoansi use playful racist humour to deal with the pressures experienced on the ‘inside’.

The categories of inside and outside are also important in being able to position oneself so as to be able to talk about any image archive or pre-archive productively. In order to make sense of the archive, one has to step out of it, or at least experiment with its boundaries. From inside the archive, any observations of the archive runs the risk of being bound by the rules of the archives. In the context of my research, the opportunity to

productively leave the archive of San images temporarily presented itself rather by chance. At one of the filmmaking workshops held in Grootfontein, Ju|'hoan participants joined me in watching several episodes of *Vikings*. The choice to watch these films rather than any others was entirely coincidental. However, after a conversation with me about the historical accuracy of the show, how it is made, and how it might tie into contemporary Scandinavian culture, one of the Ju|'hoan concluded that 'it' (*Vikings* and its production) was "like" them and that therefore "it's real". This statement brought up complex questions about the relationship between images and reality which I will comment on a little further below. More importantly, however, the ensuing conversation prompted me to spend some weeks on the set of *Vikings* to ascertain whether there really were any similarities between the production of Viking images and San images. Although perhaps unorthodox, this switching to a context and fieldsite that had only been brought together by chance and been related to each other by my informants was important in two ways.

Firstly, it was this surprisingly fruitful and apt comparison which allowed me to think of Tsumkwe as a 'pre-archival' space of image production (see Chapter Four). Secondly, the inclusion of a 'Western' film set helps clarify a shift of focus which no longer understands these image relations as a phenomenon specific to the San (and thereby feeding into any evolutionary or primitivism driven narratives) but as qualities of image-based relations which actors on a film set might be as apt at navigating as Ju|'hoansi performing for tourists in Tsumkwe. The comparison between San and *Vikings* is important because it considers idealised identities cross-culturally, rather than assuming a framework in which the San are considered to occupy a bounded, exotic realm removed from those who idealise them.

The comparison of Tsumkwe to a film set, however, does highlight the problematic way in which the notion of 'reality' comes into my work. In conversations during the writing-up process, some anthropologists have tended to understand the link between the two to mean that both are in some way 'fake'. One might indeed wonder whether the continuous reproduction of images, whether of *Vikings* or San, might best be understood in the terms of Baudrillard's concept of 'hyperreality' (Baudrillard, 1994); the idea that under endless layers of copies of copies the original has eroded away. As Chapter Four will show, however, hyperreality is not useful as a model to think about flexible image archives. The way in which images are reproduced, lived with and inhabited, and are

linked to our experience of life amounts to more than a mere process of copying. In other words, when I say that both actors on the film set and Ju|'hoansi in Tsumkwe are able to inhabit images flexibly and nomadically, I am not suggesting that, like the actors, the Ju|'hoansi's enacting of their identity is fake or put on. To the contrary, I mean to suggest that the actor's experience of portraying a character may be as profound and deep as that of a Ju|'hoansi inhabiting a San image (See Chapter Five, *Trickstering*).

Therefore, I do not find 'reality' to be a useful analytical tool. If images are the keys to our experience, then images and reality may be inseparable inside our bodies. I have to be aware, however, that my rejection of 'the real' as an absolute category does not negate the "need for the real" (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 14) in the people of whom this thesis is a study. As I show throughout my thesis, it is often a desire for the authentic and a suspicion of what is judged fake that play a part in how images are produced and navigated in Tsumkwe (see especially Chapter Four and Six).

#### IMAGE MULTIPLICITY AND AMBIVALENCE

"The truth", claims Taussig "comes in black and white, for our philosophers as much as for us" (Taussig, 2009, p. 17). I wonder if one could argue, metaphorically speaking, that images come in many colours. In fact, for most scholars of images, despite all efforts to establish coherent theories, there remains something irreconcilable about the nature of images; an ambivalence or multiplicity that defies simple categorisation. In this section we have already come across this phenomenon, for instance, in images being 'a language and not a language', images residing in the individual body but also in the collective knowledge, being inside a picture and simultaneously beyond it. Without wanting to suggest that all these authors speak of exactly the same thing, Rancière speaks of the "alterity of images" (2003, p. 5), Belting of the "duality of the internal and external" (2011 [2001], p. 9), Taylor of film as "at once subject and object to itself" (1996, p. 79) and MacDougall tells us that "images reflect the body's "conflicting impulses towards order and disorder" (2006, p. 3).

In this phenomenon of multiplicity or alterity, images and the Ju|'hoansi seem to be alike. "The image is never a simple reality" Rancière argues. Cinematic images, for instance, oscillate between different meanings of the word 'image' (2003, p. 6). In the same

way, Ju|'hoansi oscillate between different San images they may chose to inhabit. Speaking about images, Mitchell asks:

How is it [...] that people are able to maintain a “double consciousness” towards images, pictures and representations in a variety of media, vacillating between magical beliefs and sceptical doubts, naïve animism and hard headed materialism and critical attitudes?” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 7)

Again, the same words might be used to describe the polarised and shifting attitudes many outsiders have towards the Ju|'hoansi when they either consider them in terms of an idealised image – for example as ‘peaceful children of nature’ – or accuse them of being fake.

In a final example on this point, Belting claims that “one might say that images resemble nomads” (2011 [2001], p. 21). The Parallels here to the Ju|'hoansi lie not only in the Ju|'hoansi's mobility, but come from a more Deluzian understanding of nomads. As Chapter Five, *Trickstering*, argues, the San resist being conceptually pinned down through their flexible epistemology and ability to traverse different San images with ease. Speaking about images, MacDougall argues that the appeal of the visual to early anthropology lay precisely in this kind of tension of an “unconsummated suspension”, driven by a desire to ‘capture’ but ultimately failing. There seems to be a similar urgency and desire to pin down who exactly the Ju|'hoansi are, whether indigenous hunter-gatherers or disempowered minorities, for instance.

In the final words of *Iconophobia*, Taylor wonders:

Might it be that anthropologists resent documentary's resemblance – insofar as it might be said to resemble literary forms at all – not to their own plain prose, but to poetry? (Taylor, 1996, p. 88)

The notion that academic writers might in fact envy image forms, in this instance documentary, is inherently interesting. Further, speaking of images, with their somewhat uncontrollable, affective power, as ‘poetry’ is interesting because once again it connects the way San are spoken about to the way images are spoken about. The notion of poetry is raised explicitly in Chapters Two and Four, but as a term for an affective and ambiguous power it seems to underlie large parts of the thesis.

However, I am yet to discuss how I might actually be able to talk about images productively in this thesis - how, in other words to do justice to the poetry of images in an academic thesis. Taylor's advice on this is that

If anthropology is to create a space for the visual – in this case film – it must seek neither to disavow discontinuities between the two nor to transform one into the other (Taylor, 1996, p. 86)

Images and text – even academic writing – are inseparably linked, as I have shown above. Nonetheless, there are differences between the two which, although perhaps not quantifiable, need to be treated with respect. “In considering our use of images, it is no good simply insisting that we must do a better job of adapting them to the rules of scholarly writing. This will lead only to bad compromises”, Mac Dougal argues (2006, p. 2). Similarly, unreflexively adapting scholarly writing to some kind of image logic would be equally detrimental. However, on occasion I take my mission to respect the image to be a justification for some level of experimentation. For instance, in Chapter Five, I give preference to an argumentative logic which embraces ambivalence and does not proceed entirely linearly.

According to MacDougall, anthropological writing “gradually subsumed and bypassed the visual” (2006, p. 231). In other words, the discipline of anthropology generally is better at writing than image-based communication. In my particular case, however, as someone who started becoming interested in anthropology *after* training as a filmmaker, I consider myself more literate and fluent visually than in writing. Undoubtedly, this has an impact on the way I write. Of course, I am not alone in this and share this disposition and background with many others, including Anna Grimshaw, who, like me but of course long before me, used the notion of ‘mise-en-scène’ in her writing. The mise-en-scène in filmmaking describes all the elements on the screen that contribute to a specific ‘feel’ or message of the film – for instance the colour of the walls, the movement of the extras, the steam rising from a kettle. To Grimshaw, using the (admittedly vague) principle of ‘mise-en-scène’ in writing means that “an argument emerges through a slow process of accretion” and she explains that her “interest in using cinematic principles as the basis for the textual presentation arises from the desire to forge a creative connection between form and content” (Grimshaw, 2001, p. xi). My own rationale for using ‘mise-en-scène’ as a guiding principle of Chapter Three is slightly different. I am not driven so much by the

desire for a “creative connection between form and content”, but rather chose to dedicate a chapter to the sensate impressions embedded in my fieldwork. My choice was thus more functional than it was symbolic. However, I do agree with Grimshaw when she links the use of a *mise-en-scène* to an “expression of academic caution” (2001, p. 12). To do justice to both images and productive forms of academic writings means that neither is absolute and complete in its ability to express anthropological thought. Acknowledging this interdependence is necessary for creating the “anthropological perspective to ground the double nature of images” and to provide the solid ground without which “we risk reducing images to mere artefacts of technology” (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 15).

There is a further element in how we perceive and think about images which goes beyond what can be neatly summarised. Many writers touch on the notion that images are somehow considered dangerous, when not suitably controlled. This perceived danger, suggests MacDougall, stems from a fear of “undirected potential” (2006, p. 222) if films are not properly captioned and put into structures. Taussig speaks of colours as a “combustible mix of attraction and repulsion” (2009, p. 9), a description which points towards the powerful affective qualities of visuality. Taylor suggests that film may be resented because of how watching a movie compels one to submit to it. (1996, p. 72). Grimshaw speaks of pictures being considered “seductive, dazzling, deceptive and illusory” (2001, p. 5)

In light of the language these authors use to describe the ways in which images are considered dangerous, one cannot help but wonder if maybe an even more explicitly feminist perspective than suggested at the beginning of this section might be called for when confronting images. Taylor understands Baxter’s and Bloch’s issue with film as a frustration over film not handing its thesis to them “on a plate” (Taylor, 1996, p. 77). Equally, however, one could frame their feelings about film as being indicative of a resentment over a lack of control over its content. Perhaps, there is something to be gained from thinking of pictures as occupying the position of ‘difficult women’ or *femme fatales*, who are spoken of as dangerous, seductive, deceptive and alluring, and who have to be pinned down and controlled, who are ‘sensed in the body’, are as powerful as they are evasive, know their place, are there to look pretty, and last but not least, challenge a straightforward, well-structured masculine logic.

As productive and tempting as such a comparison may or may not be, it goes beyond the scope of this thesis. The notion that much of any discomfort over images may be associated with issues of control, however, is worth noting.

It is important to understand this fear, for none of us is completely free of it. It is the fear of giving ourselves unconditionally to what we see. It seems to me that this fear is allied to our fear of abandoning the protection of conceptual thought, which screens us from a world which might otherwise consume our consciousness” (MacDougall, 2006, p. 8)

## How

The gathering of ethnographic data, obtained through participant observation, which informs this thesis, happened largely in Tsumkwe and the surrounding Nyae Nyae villages. Travelling by car with a roof tent I stayed sometimes at the camping ground of Tsumkwe Country Lodge, sometimes in one of the villages, sometimes in the hotel which local, non-White travellers tended to stay at, and sometimes in one of the rooms of the community centre. The community centre consisted of a paved courtyard surrounded by stalls people could rent to sell goods, rooms meant for training, facilities for a Kindergarten, some lower level local authority offices, and accommodation. Most of these facilities, however, were not in use. Only some of the stalls were rented out to people selling second-hand clothing and snacks, a municipality administrator had an office there, and the Kindergarten facilities were used. Other than that, the area served as a gathering ground for teenagers and children.

Although my research was based on participant observation, it benefitted from a Ju|’hoan filmmaking project which I was able to support with my experience in filmmaking, my equipment and technical support. This, in turn, allowed me to use film in my participatory research to explore relationality. This project was instigated by my mentioning that I had brought a camera to a Ju|’hoan friend and that I would be happy for him to use it to make a film. Quickly, a group gathered around this idea who wanted to turn Ju|’hoan filmmaking into an official project. The Project was given the name CEDU. ‘ce du’, in Ju|’hoan means ‘to do something over’, and referred to the project’s



ambition to redefine the Ju|'hoansi's relationship with film. Its spelling in all capital letters is not in reference to an acronym but was the way in which the participants wished for it to be spelled.

Part of my agreement with the Nyae Nyae Conservancy and the 'Chief'<sup>4</sup> was that in return for my doing fieldwork there I would support the Ju|'hoan filmmaking efforts. It is important to emphasise, however, that CEDU was, and is, entirely owned by its Ju|'hoan participants. While I hope to help publish some of the films made in the future, they are the creative and intellectual property of the Ju|'hoansi who made them and not part of my thesis. Any material from these films, such as quotations and screenshots, which are used in this thesis are used with the explicit permission of the filmmakers.

In talking about the separation between my thesis and CEDU, it is also worth noting that while my research is complete to the point that you are currently holding its outcome in your hands, it does not mark the completion of CEDU. As I was told many times by many Ju|'hoansi, things take a very long time in Tsumkwe. The period of CEDU that overlapped with my research was thus only the beginning of what will hopefully be a longstanding engagement. During my time in Tsumkwe, the group ran a fundraiser to cover the costs of a computer to edit on and some additional equipment. Seven short films were made in total. Since I have left, the speed of production has gone down but I know from communication with some of my friends that films are still being made and I hope to continue to support them in the future.

## IMAGES AND FILMMAKING

The previous section touched on the relationship between anthropology and images and in some instances mentioned film explicitly as a point of contention for some anthropologists. Here, I want to elaborate on how filmmaking is a way to engage with images and how the fact that Ju|'hoansi were engaged in the activity of filmmaking enhanced the scope of my research and provided a technique to challenge existing frameworks.

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<sup>4</sup> The elected representative of the Ju|'hoansi required by the government for the Ju|'hoansi to receive the same recognition as other indigenous groups in Namibia which are usually organised in tribes. San, including Ju|'hoansi are not organised in tribes and traditionally do not have 'chiefs'.

I have shown above why I am interested in images. The question of how images become a technique is, although related, a slightly different one. One of the earliest ways in which anthropology attempted to make use of film was as a recording device which produces visual data. The most prominent example of this is Mead's and Bateson's work in Bali from 1936 to 1939, where they made use of photographic and cinematographic recording technologies. The benefit of photographs and film, in Mead's opinion, was the fact that photographs, once taken, could be "subjected to continual re-analysis" (Scherer, 1988, p. 134). However, because, as we established above, vision is an embodied activity and because visual and text based material are in many ways fundamentally different, Mead's and Bateson's experimental approach was never fully developed, due to differences in opinion on how objective and 'scientific' film could be (see Grimshaw, 2001, pp. 87-88). As MacDougall (2006, p. 224) shows, their collaboration and lack of disagreement on how to use the camera highlights "two divergent conceptions of photography – one an extension of the mind and one an extension of the eye". Questions about the role of the camera are complex and unavoidable, and make filmmaking anything but an objective, neutral recording technique. Conveniently, in the context of my research I do not have to answer such questions since I made no films myself. Observing how others struggled or did not struggle with such questions was an opportunity for insightful data.

However, the that film is not an unproblematic reality-storage-device, does not mean that it cannot effectively be used to convey anthropological insight. Bill Nichols (2001) identifies six modes of representation – expository, poetic, observational, participatory, performative, and reflexive – which tend to be combined, rather than exist purely in one form or another. These communicative modes, as well as film's recording qualities, can come together in a variety of ways. *Trobriand Cricket* (Kildea, 1975), for instance, was analysed by Sally Ann Ness - who conducted a motion analysis of the game depicted in the film (Ness, 1988)- after its publication and independent of the film's inherent meaning. An edited film can, in this way, still function as a record. Films as records and films that communicate anthropological knowledge can both be used in teaching (Heider, 1983). Timothy Asch's *The Ax Fight* (1975) combines the qualities of raw material and anthropological analysis in a piece which takes the viewer through several stages of

interpretation and in this way not only comments on Yanomami kinship but on the process of anthropological analysis as well (Nichols, 1996).

Suhr and Willerslev (2012) point out that it is precisely the ways in which the camera differs from the human eye – chiefly its capacity for montage – which allows for a mode of communication which transcends that of the written word. An apt example is John Marshall's film *A Kalahari Family* (2001). Through juxtaposition of different images – different in terms of the year they were recorded, the people pictured and what people are doing – scenes are allowed to comment in each other through careful editing. They present a multiplicity of perspectives which would have been difficult to convey in writing (Van Vuuren, 2009).

This multiplicity of perspectives which film enables is of particular importance for my research. One of the key challenges of this thesis is to come to terms with the Ju|'hoansi's ability to experience multiplicity.

Moreover, however, an ethnographic film can tell us something about the filmmaker themselves and the paradigm she subscribes to. Asch's portrayal of an axe fight (1975) can tell us about how he views anthropology and the relationship between the subject and the filmmaker. The differences in style between John Marshall's earliest film *The Hunters* (1957) and his final film, *A Kalahari Family* (2003), shows how his perception of the San and their situation and his attitude towards his own role as a filmmaker shifted. While *The Hunters* is the work of a young man who was primarily fascinated by the glamour of hunting (Marshall, 1993, p. 39), his later work reflects the ambiguities and problems he had come to know about through his lifelong engagement with the Ju|'hoansi.

Behind any film there is a message that the filmmaker is trying to convey. Inherent in this message and its presentation are stereotypes. Images of the other are actually images of the West (Banks and Murphy, 1997:25). As MacDougall points out:

Since all films are cultural artefacts, many can tell us as much about the society that produced them as about those they purport to describe. Film can thus serve as a source of data in the manner of myths, rock paintings, and government papers. (MacDougall, 1978: 405)

It is this understanding of film as a multifaceted artefact of intent and worldview which I believe to be most useful for the purpose of this thesis.

Handing the camera over to the research subject and utilising film as an insight into the way its maker understands the world was pioneered by Sol Worth. In 1972, he set out to find out more about the Navajo's cognitive "grammar" by providing them with film cameras and basic training and analysing the results. Worth understood film as a language based on visual communication which, once decoded, could expose the categories employed by the Navajo filmmaker. In an article which further elaborates on his concept of visual communication, he defines it as "the transmission of a signal, perceived primarily through visual receptors, treated as a message, from which content or meaning is inferred (Worth, 1968, p. 122). More precisely, he schematised the entire process of coding and decoding as follows:

FC (feeling concern of author) -> SO (story organism) -> IE (image event) -> SO  
(story organism inferred by viewer) -> FC (feeling concern inferred by viewer  
based on inferred story organism). (Worth, 1968, p. 126)

The consequent interpretation of the Story Organism is informed by the producers' cognitive world and way of seeing and thinking about the world (Worth, 1968, p. 124). By analysing the films produced by the Navajo and the Story Organisms they contained, Worth made deductions regarding their cognitive categories. For example, he makes a connection between the way in which camera movement was used by the Navajo and the importance of movement in the Navajo's cognitive world, reflected in the variety of different words for different speeds of walking or the importance of movement in the conceptualisation of events (Worth & Adair, 1972, pp. 199-203)

While Worth's work promises exciting insight, there are some limitations to this method. The first lies on the side of the person interpreting the film. MacDougall argues that all film is viewed ethnocentrically (MacDougall, 1987, p. 54) and Worth himself found that the more similar the viewer is to the producer (in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender) the more accurately an intended message could be decoded (1968, p. 122). This means that as anthropologists we cannot automatically assume that we are able to unproblematically decode films.

The other issue lies in the fact that through whichever process the participants were taught to make films influences the film itself. Turner (1992, pp. 6-7) cautions that the collision between anthropologist, subject and camera needs to be considered carefully. Like Worth, Turner, when working with the Kayapo attempted to not 'teach' Western

editing or framing styles that would make their films more accessible for a Western audience. However, the power of those who hand over the camera never disappears (ibid). Turner emphasises that access to the equipment within the community and questions of who does what can become problematic and fraught with complex social dynamics:

precisely whom she/he hands [the camera] to can become a very touchy question, and may involve consequences for which the researcher bears inescapable responsibility. (Turner, 1992, p. 7)

Negotiations that happen around filmmaking can create useful ethnographic data in itself. Worth has been critiqued for focussing too much on the filmic rather than the social frame of their study. According to Ginsburg (1991, p. 95), the researchers were too concerned with a different cognitive grammar and did not consider potential differences in the social relations around image making, even though such concerns were voiced by one of the Navajo elders when he asked Worth “Why make film?” (Worth and Adair, 1972, 289).

Ginsburg argues that film should not simply be read as another ‘text’ but rather as a process of mediation between and within the community that occurs through film and video work (1991, p. 94). Turner, too, emphasises that film is not only an artefact of itself but also of the process and production (1992, p. 7). Ginsburg elaborates:

the way in which tapes are made shown and used reflect Walpiri understanding of kinship and group responsibilities for display and access to traditional knowledge” (1991, p. 98)

Observations around the production and reception of indigenous media become data which can contribute to a better understanding of the informants conceptualisation of categories. A film, after all, is not just the finished product, but as MacDougall points out:

Films are structured works made for presentation to an audience. They make manifest within themselves the analysis that justifies such a presentation (1978, p. 407)

Therefore, as Turner argues,

the indigenous filmmaker’s employment of his/her own cultural categories in the production of the video may reveal their essential character more clearly than the completed video itself (1992, p. 8)

A final aspect to consider is the function of film, related to its ability to highlight processes around its production, is its quality as a catalyst. Jean Rouch, who explicitly understood the camera as an ‘agent provocateur’ (de Jong, et al., 2014, p. 348) made use of this by producing with his informants what he called ethno-fiction. *Moi, un Noir* (1958), for example, allows the viewer compelling ethnographic insight, even though the story lines of the film are entirely fictional. By acknowledging that the camera provokes performance and not stifling the creative process, Rouch managed to create a platform for people to express how they feel about their lives. By embracing the performative aspects of film and the awareness that whatever situation the camera depicts, it is simultaneously part of it, Jean Rouch manages to create deep, multi-layered ethnographic material which is at once method, record, and a medium for communication.

### MY METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The way in which I used film during my research borrows from all these approaches, but it is also embedded in Tsumkwe’s history of engagement with film. The Ju|’hoansi in Tsumkwe have been the subject of films since John Marshall first made *The Hunters* in the 1950s. Since then, it has been the setting of *The Gods must be Crazy* (1980), and countless documentaries of all levels of production scales. Many of the Ju|’hoansi, especially those living in villages that are particularly picturesque or being particularly good at skills filmmakers are interested in (such as hunting and dancing) have been in front of a camera on many occasions. As Strong notes, unlike the Navajo, the Ju|’hoansi’s lives have been deeply impacted by films (2015, p. 247). At the same time, some Ju|’hoansi regularly watch TV or films, either on computers and tablets owned by individuals or on one of the few TVs in Tsumkwe.

The filmmaking workshops I offered originated from my bringing my film camera to Tsumkwe and casually offering Ju|’hoan friends to let them borrow it for making films. There was an enthusiastic response to this – especially George and Joel, who had spent a lot of time in front of cameras, had long harboured ambitions to make their own films. While I had initially imagined any workshops to be fairly casual, it soon emerged that we had to turn our practical engagement with film into an official project (See chapter Three). The birth of CEDU (which translates to “doing something over”) was chiefly led by Ju|’hoansi and is responsible for many of the key ethnographic moments in this thesis

(See for example Chapter Six and Seven). As part of this “projectification” CEDU acquired a website (now offline) and ran a fundraising campaign which raised enough money to buy a computer for editing films. As soon as the initially interested people and I had established that filmmaking workshops would be running regularly, we advertised the workshops in Ju|’hoan language on the local radio, on flyers at the community centre, and through word of mouth. In the beginning, we met at my camp site, but later we occupied a space in the partly abandoned community centre (more on this in Chapter Three). Depending on what we were planning to do, the workshops were also often held somewhere entirely different. Similarly, the timing of the workshops ebbed and flowed according to the availability of participants. Occasionally, we would meet every day for a week or so, and sometimes there were prolonged breaks. Throughout my fieldwork, there was roughly one meeting a week on average. To give a precise number is difficult; sometimes social occasions would merge into workshops and vice versa. Both the location and scheduling of the workshops very much reflected the Ju|’hoan flexibility I refer to throughout this thesis. Participants, similarly were also not entirely consistent. Initially, no women signed up for the workshops. Later, we consistently had two female participants. Usually, between 7 and 12 people participated, ranging from teenagers to individuals in their fifties. About half of the participants spoke fluent English, the other half communicated in Ju|’hoan or Afrikaans. Overall, the workshops grew organically out of my initially humble offer to let people use my camera. This organic growth, perhaps, might also be a reflection of Tsumkwe’s embeddedness in the medium of film.

The Ju|’hoansi’s familiarity with film is particularly important with regards to concerns about how Western notions of film might influence Ju|’hoan film productions. In the case of the Ju|’hoansi who have been part of many film productions before, handing the camera over can not only tell us things about how they view whatever is depicted – in the sense of Sol Worth’s work – but also about how the Ju|’hoansi understand film.

I did try, as much as possible, to not provide too many guidelines when giving filmmaking workshops. For instance, I discussed techniques for different levels of close ups or wide shots, but did not specify which should be used in what situation. Similarly, I attempted to explain the mechanics of editing without going into by what rules I would personally put together a film.

However, not only is it impossible to teach filmmaking without transmitting at least some of one's own understanding of what a film should look like, but the Ju|'hoansi are already watching Western media on the internet and on the TVs which a handful of people in Tsumkwe owned.

Being around filmmaking, rather than making films myself, was productive and central to the insight generated in this thesis in several ways. Firstly, in a straightforward way of studying images, I do make use of one of the films produced by the participants as primary data in Chapter Five.

Moreover, however, filmmaking acted as a social catalyst. Discussions around films and problems that surfaced made explicit how others and the self were imagined. These processes also shed light on what issues participants prioritised and how their understanding of these issues compared to that of the people around them. The process of making films makes vision an explicit and reflexive activity which that makes an engagement with images explicit. If film is "at once subject and object to itself" (Taylor, 1996, p. 79), then film may not be suitable for creating neutral records but it *is* a good way to reflect on how images are embedded in our reality. Being involved in helping people make films produced ethnographic observations of how participants interacted with images and with each other in relation to images.

Further, linking back to my earlier discussion on how images differ from words, an engagement with film allowed me and the participants to collectively reflect on things which we otherwise might not have been able to express or would have thought of. Stepping outside the bounds of the San image archive, for instance, was only made possible by a comparison between Tsumkwe and *Vikings* which neither I nor the Ju|'hoansi would have conceived of through conversation alone.

Beyond the filmmaking workshops, film also featured as an important practical element in my fieldwork in the form of offering to the people I stayed with to watch Marshall documentaries together. I always had the complete body of John Marshall's work on the San with me on DVDs. While I stayed in Ju|'hoan villages, I always offered that we could watch some together. Partly, these 'screenings' were part of what I contributed to village life as a guest and reflected my interest in filmmaking which was made clearer by watching and talking about films together. Furthermore, the films acted as a catalyst for conversations both about the subjects of the films – traditional San life



and the history of Tsumkwe – and John Marshall’s legacy. Both these themes are important throughout the thesis. I chose the Marshall documentaries, rather than other films made about San – such as *The Great Dance: A Hunter’s Story* (2000) – due to their embeddedness in Tsumkwe’s history and the social life of the Ju|’hoansi. As emerges particularly in Chapter Three and Four, the legacy of John Marshall and his films continues to play an important part in Nyae Nyae and in how both Ju|’hoansi and outsiders relate to and understand images of San. Which of the Marshall films in particular I offered for was often determined by the nature of the relation the villages had to the films. For instance, in the village where Marshall filmed most of *Nai, story of a Kung woman*, we watched this film, whereas in Nhoma I offered *The Hunters* which had a broader appeal and referred more to the history of San hunting in general.

As Grimshaw argues, “visual technologies offer scope for individual self-reflection” which leads to “different kinds of relationships” (2001, p. 3). The filmmaking workshops impacted my fieldwork in ways which went well beyond an engagement with images per se. The “different relationships” which resulted from the workshops echoed throughout my time in Tsumkwe, providing me with social support and access to social situations I would otherwise not have been privy to. Furthermore, the way in which the filmmaking workshop was turned into a ‘project’ allowed me insight into the NGO scene in Tsumkwe.

Beyond all the reasons given above, however, using filmmaking as a way of better understanding the experience of Ju|’hoansi in Tsumkwe is somewhat poetically appropriate. “Films have a way of exceeding theoretical bounds” argues Taylor (1996, p. 88). Just like the Ju|’hoansi resist neat definition or being pinned down in a singular image, the process of filmmaking happens on a multiplicity of registers, embracing the alterity of images.

The question remains whether my research is within the remit of visual anthropology. After all, I neither made a film (nor produced any other visual media for the purpose of data collection or communication of anthropological analysis), nor is my focus strictly only on visible forms (as established above, images do not necessarily always need the visual). According to MacDougall’s definition, that visual anthropology is not concerned with “the visual per se but about a range of culturally inflected relationships enmeshed and encoded in the visual” (2006, p. 221), my thesis would most likely qualify.

However, Sarah Pink (2007, p. 3) calls for visual anthropology to also constitute social interventions; that is, using film in anthropological research should lead to positive social changes or outcomes. One of the chapters of her edited volume *Visual Interventions* even gives an account of a collaborative filmmaking project with San in Botswana. Durington critiques romanticised ideas about the San and hopes that film made by San about their political situation can “set the record straight” (2007, p. 191). Although both Durington and I talk about collaborative filmmaking, there are very few similarities in how we are positioned to our research subjects. It is important to note that the socioeconomic situation of people identified as San is very different in Namibia compared to Botswana, where San are being moved to resettlement areas and disincentivised from living traditionally (Solway, 2009). Possibly because of this difference, Durington frames his study and motivation to give the San a voice and means of representation politically. Rather than considering existing San images as a multiplicity, he speaks about the representation of San along the lines of a romanticism/modernity dichotomy. Film, he argues, is a way “to describe what happens on the ground when stereotypes run into reality” (Durington, 2007, p. 204).

Durington’s work is clearly valuable and important, particularly in the context of the political challenges which the San face in Botswana. However, framing the situation as a dichotomy between romanticism and modern reality, does not work for the context I am working in. As this thesis shows, San images exist in a vast and complex variety in Tsumkwe and I explicitly hesitate to brand any of these images as the ‘real image’ which needs to be shown. In line with this, the films Ju|’hoansi wanted to make in CEDU were often about their own lives, rather than political messages. For me to steer this into a more explicitly political direction would have been too imposing for my liking, and would have meant taking charge in a very particular way. While I personally do think that there are political points that should be made with regards to the Ju|’hoansi and their right to make films, I do not think that this thesis is the best place to do that.

Instead, by making use of an approach that appreciates images and their elusive, vague, and ambiguous qualities as both a method and a subject, I position myself against binary narratives of San which cast them purely as victims.

## Summary of Chapters

**Chapter Two**, following this introduction, provides a historical overview of how San have been understood over the last two centuries. This chapter is neither a literature review in the strictest sense, nor is it meant to give an account of San history. Instead, building on the work of Gordon and Barnard in particular, the chapter's purpose is to show how the San have been *imagined*. The San have been imagined as the missing link between apes and man, as savages, as harmless, as children of nature, as enlightened, and irrational. I do not mean to suggest a coherent narrative of how these images developed, but rather provide snapshots of particularly important and defining image-making events.

I start with a broad look at the image of the 'primitive' as the antithesis to 'modern man' in general. Adam Smith's model of the four stages of society, despite not being based on knowledge of actual foraging communities, provided a blueprint for placing hunter-gatherers at the bottom of an imagined scale of societies. When colonial travellers first encountered the San, they quickly projected onto them all the lack of virtues which they thought the lowest form of society would possess.

While the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw Bushmen exhibited like animals and even in 1925 travellers were still searching for 'earth-dwellers' with no discernible language, scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to shift their attitude towards the San. Perhaps most prominently, it was Laurens van der Post who, in the words of his daughter, gave 'poetic force' to the Bushmen, despite the fact that research after his death revealed that most of the claims that van der Post made in his BBC series *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, were made up. With a look at the Marshall expedition I begin focussing specifically on the image of the Ju|'hoansi in Nyae Nyae and on Tsumkwe as a place which epitomises San-ness.

The important point to take away from this chapter is that the images which have been created of the San, no matter how outdated, do not go away. Rather, remnants of these images remain and live on in the minds of those who come to Tsumkwe. While the collection of images which the San inhabit is heterogeneous, there are some themes which seem to appear repeatedly. At the very core, however, lies a scepticism of who the San are. This is evident when an expedition in 1925 does not consider people living in stone houses

‘real’ San, in the Great Kalahari debate, and in the debate between Marshall and Bieseke about which mode of subsistence is most suitable for the Ju|’hoansi of Nyae Nyae.

Towards the end of the chapter there is a small amount of ethnographic data to support my claim that these images endure into the ethnographic present. Generally, however, this chapter relies on literature rather than primary data.

In contrast, **Chapter Three** is a purely ethnographic account of some of my initial encounters in Tsumkwe and Nyae Nyae. I describe the road to Tsumkwe, a village just on the outside of Nyae Nyae, a village in Nyae Nyae and how some of the institutions reacted to the proposed filmmaking workshops. I begin the chapter with a mostly coherent narrative which slowly becomes more doubtful, interweaving small excerpts from my field notes.

Putting an ethnographic account of experiences that did not always seem to make sense *after* the discussion of externally constructed images of the San was deliberate. My goal was to explicitly not give the impression that my experience could be explained by existing literature, but rather that available notions of who the San are helped shape my ethnographic experience.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide atmospheric context for the rest of the thesis and to show how subjects which are the focus of other chapters – such as imagined pasts, traversing of spheres, and inter-NGO conflict - are interwoven. If Chapter One represents the equivalent of a “what happened so far...” section at the beginning of a show, this chapter represents its opening shots.

After Chapter One and Two have set the scene in terms of existing literature on San image making and ethnographic context, **Chapter Four** sets out to develop my theoretical framework by introducing the notion of what I call the Pre-Archive – a conceptual space which, rather than creating a hegemony of truth, enables a multiplicity of truths about San-ness to exist. Engaging with Derrida’s notion of the archive, the subject of this chapter are both Ju|’hoansi and the outsiders (tourists and NGOs) they interact with.

I begin the chapter with an ethnographic puzzle. At one of the filmmaking workshops, the participants claim that a fictional TV show about Vikings is ‘real’ because it is, in Komtsa’s words “like us”. From this follows an exploration of how cultural products of both Tsumkwe as a site of San image production and the filmset of *Vikings* are judged

based on whether or not they conform to subjective markers of authenticity. The reason that people are drawn to these cultural products and want them to be authentic, is that they are bound up with a desire for origin and spirituality. Both Vikings and ancient hunter-gatherers, who the Ju|'hoansi are taken for, evoke notions of a human past which is just about beyond the reach of history.

In the chapter's final section, I use 'prehistory' to complicate the notion of archives as frameworks which curate history and serve as reference points for claims of authenticity. The issue with archives of both ancient hunter-gatherers and Vikings is that, in lieu of written records, their records are performative, visual, and oral. For non-written records to be meaningful they have to continuously be created and re-created. Records are not fixed, but shift between each iteration.

This structure of flexible reference points lends itself easily to self-projection and conjecture. Thus, the pre-archive is a place that easily invites subjective truths to be confirmed. At the same time, it allows for a multiplicity of truth precisely because its gatekeepers are all those complicit in the performance of non-written records.

Tsumkwe is a pre-archival space because it is not governed by a single interpretation of what it means to be San, but rather indulges each individual subjective truth. To be clear, this is not to say that Tsumkwe 'pretends' to be San in a number of ways, but rather that all versions of San-ness are legitimate in Tsumkwe. The purpose of this chapter is to set up a way for the remainder of the thesis to meaningfully talk about Ju|'hoan experience of multiplicity and the multiplicity of San images.

**Chapter Five** then explores how this pre-archival space is inhabited fluidly and presents three different models to think about movement between different truths. It is worth establishing that although San are well known to embrace fluidity, this does not mean that they are in any way incapable of reasoning based on the rule of non-contradiction. I establish this with the help of an ethnographic account about reading tracks, in order to clarify that my argument is in no way aligned with prejudiced notions of San being incapable of linear modes of thinking.

The first model I explore is that of the Nomad. Speaking strictly in terms of geographical movement, contemporary San are largely considered to be settled and no longer following game and veldfruit according to season. In Tsumkwe, the lack of

availability from natural water holes and the provision of water pumps in villages, along with the necessity to have a registered address to receive the national pension, has led to the map of Nyae Nyae having remained almost unchanged over the last twenty years. Using a variety of ethnographic examples, I show, however, that individuals remain geographically flexible, often moving between houses and villages on a whim. This geographical mobility, I argue can be used as a model to understand how Ju|'hoansi move between different San images.

I then introduce a film one of the participants made about traditional Ju|'hoan life. I had originally been hesitant to encourage the workshop participants to make films that I anticipated would too closely mirror the kind of films they had been part of previously. I was worried that such films would be mere copies of pictures created by Western filmmakers. However, the film I discuss in this chapter proves that the Ju|'hoan filmmaker was at ease inside European-American aesthetics of filmmaking while simultaneously offering a uniquely Ju|'hoan perspective, combining different tropes of popular San imagery with a story that was both distinctly Ju|'hoan and personal to him.

Leading on from Joel's film, I explore the model of the actor in a brief return to the filmset of *Vikings*. The example of how actors on an Irish filmset are able to experience their own reality and the reality of the character they are portraying simultaneously (and with equal perceived authenticity) serves to show that being able to occupy different truths at once is not a Ju|'hoan particularity inaccessible to the Western observer.

The most intuitive model to think about Ju|'hoan fluidity, however, is the figure of the Trickster who can move between the different spheres and occupy different states of being simultaneously. Whether we use the model of the Trickster, the actor or the Nomad, flexible movement, at least as long as it is within the context of interaction between Ju|'hoansi and non-San, is a skill that needs to be mastered. It is mastery which allows for creative experimentation, such as, for example, Joel's film. I conclude Chapter Five by hypothesising that what Komtsa meant when he compared Tsumkwe to a film set, was that he has to inhabit his environment creatively and navigate competing truths and images carefully in order create valuable cultural products, all the while considering all locations of this web of images as equally authentic and meaningful.

**In Chapter Six**, I move my focus closer to non-San, specifically to NGO workers and the phenomenon of their often staying in Tsumkwe for a shorter time than initially they had planned. In part one of the chapter, I use the example of a newly arrived family from Switzerland working for a Namibian NGO in Tsumkwe to explore what motivates aid workers to come to Tsumkwe, the worldviews they bring with them, and the compromises those, who stay for a long time, make. Overall, I argue that, rather than merely having their scope of developmental effort limited by the constrictions of San image, as has been argued elsewhere, it is the San image which attracts many development workers and it is ultimately Ju|'hoan sociality which keeps in check international worldviews looking to dominate Tsumkwe.

I argue that similarly to tourists, NGO workers and other 'helpers' are attracted to Tsumkwe because of the association of San with both geographical and historical remoteness – an element which may be important for many of those who have a 'need to help' – and because San are considered worth saving due to their status as Stone Age remnants.

Despite this steady influx of NGO workers, however, I note that many of the individuals coming to help stay only a short time and many leave, frustrated that the Ju|'hoansi do not continue to participate in their projects despite earlier enthusiasm. Those who do stay often develop coping mechanisms and find themselves adapting their behaviour profoundly for it to fit into a life with the Ju|'hoansi.

I explain this phenomenon by making use of both the notion of Trickster movement through the pre-archival space, established in previous chapters, and egalitarian Ju|'hoan sociality. NGOs are initially welcomed and may feel their views of the world and who the San are or should be validated when they enter Tsumkwe, and like the tourists, have their pre-existing images confirmed by Ju|'hoansi. However, once they assume too dominant a position, the Ju|'hoansi often limit or withdraw their support, ensuring that no one singular San image becomes more powerful than the other.

**Chapter Seven** explores how the egalitarian pressures established in Chapter Six and the pressures of expectations from outsiders established in Chapter Two and Four are dealt with by Ju|'hoansi, especially those who occupy Trickster-like positions of negotiating relationships with non-San. I argue that 'outside' spaces are crafted through humorous

play which caricatures essentialised San identities, in order to temporarily leave the image archive.

Being able to get away from the pressures of Tsumkwe and Nyae Nyae was important to the Ju|'hoansi I worked with. Removing themselves physically gave individuals the opportunity to recover from the constant pressures of egalitarianism and expectations from tourists, NGO workers and researchers. However, I argue that release from these pressures was also achieved in socially constructed spaces of offensive humour.

In order to begin understanding the construction of 'outsides' in the context of Ju|'hoan sociality, I begin with an ethnographic description of how sand is physically stayed in touch with and incorporated into social interactions. In the process of reading tracks, however, sand is explicitly not being touched. Instead, a hunter reading tracks occupies an ontological position detached from the 'here and now' and, in seeing a set of tracks, is able to see events unfold from a perspective that collapses temporal and spatial boundaries. This establishes an important link between fluidity and crafting 'outsides': In order to traverse conceptual boundaries, one has to be able to detach oneself from the categories which the boundaries contain.

To begin talking about what racist humour achieves in the context of crafting outsides I give an ethnographic account of Peter, an eccentric German living in Grootfontein who buys San crafts for his shop. While he is offensively rude for the purpose of being rude with most Black and White Namibians alike, his relationship with the Ju|'hoansi is special. While he aggressively makes fun of and belittles his Ju|'hoansi visitors, they laugh at, and participate in his offensive humour in a way that would be unthinkable in a public context in Tsumkwe where San images are negotiated carefully and are powerful political tools. Disassociating themselves from complex San image politics in this way, Peter and the Ju|'hoansi are able to have a respectful relationship with one another which, while not negating the unequal power dynamics between them, expresses a desire to move beyond them.

Of course, there are many contexts worldwide where offensive terminology is reappropriated in systematic, political efforts. This, however is not what happens in the context of Ju|'hoansi joking with Peter or other outsiders, or when Ju|'hoansi shout 'Yo, Bushman' at each other or when they joke about one of their friends being 'the first tourist'. What happens instead, I argue, is that the Ju|'hoansi come together in humorous



play, sometimes with non-San and sometimes with other Ju|'hoansi, in order to experiment with their identity roles in a context where, temporarily, the loaded terms of San images are only a joke or, in their words, 'just funny'.

### LIST OF KEY CHARACTERS

For reference, I present a list of the major characters featured in this thesis. While it is necessary in an anthropological thesis to generalise where appropriate, The San, as Bieseke shows are not prone to generalisation (1993, p. 55). I want to use this list to emphasise that all the individuals I worked and conducted research with had unique and complex relationships to their identity as San and Ju|'hoansi. Without exception, all of the Ju|'hoansi I spoke to had many names. This is both due to the fact that Ju|'hoansi establish kinship through names in every social context they enter (Marshall, 1957, p. 25) and that non-San names are sometimes considered to provide situational advantage (Widlok, 2000, p. 375). For coherence, I use one name for each, despite the fact that they would be referred to differently depending on context. Except for isolated instances, all names in this thesis have been anonymised, as agreed with my informants. Both I and the people anonymised are aware, however, that those with an intimate knowledge of Tsumkwe might still be able to identify certain individuals.

#### **Eliza:**

*"I am a Bushman, because my mother is from the Bush and because I like the traditional foods that White people can't eat"*

A young woman who identified as half German/ half San, fluent in German, English, Ju|'hoan, Afrikaans, and !Kung dialects. She spent about half her time in Grootfontein with her German father and her Ju|'hoan mother, and half her time in Tsumkwe with her mother's family. While fluent in Ju|'hoan and being related to or knowing almost everyone in Nyae Nyae, she sometimes demonstrated a lack of knowledge about traditional Ju|'hoan behaviour and customs, prompting other Ju|'hoansi to tease her. This, however, did not preclude her from her status as 'Ju|'hoan' which she was able to claim because of family ties, language fluency, and self-identification. Eliza accompanied my research for a while and took on key responsibilities in the filmmaking project.

#### **Joel:**

*“I was born here and I will die here and there is no other place I want to be.”*

A man in his 40s who identified as Ju|’hoan, by birth and by conviction. He worked as a freelance tour guide and translator. Even though he was not an accomplished hunter and despite his comparatively digital life style, he had a deep love for the Kalahari and would frequently point out particularly interesting plants or comment on the behaviour of animals. He makes friends easily and has been both to Europe and the US on a number of occasions.

**George:**

*“Money is evil.”*

A man in his 50s, grandson of ≠Toma, the subject of John Marshall’s documentaries and son of Ju|’hoansi chief Bobo, whom he has a strained relationship with. Always ready with a joke or profound words of wisdom, he approaches both San and non-San with a healthy dose of cynicism. He often expressed frustration with identity politics in Tsumkwe and is married to a non-San woman who lives in Tsumkwe with him.

**Boyscout:**

*“Yo, Bushman!”*

A man in his 30s with a particularly keen eye for reading tracks. His Ju|’hoan name is the same as George’s and he resents the nickname ‘Boyscout’, but is used to everybody calling him this. He often showed signs of having an ambivalent relationship to his Ju|’hoan identity, taking Ju|’hoan knowledge very seriously on the one hand and poking fun at his being a “Bushman” on the other. One of his favourite anecdotes was the story of how he flirted with a German woman in Cologne - where he helped German scientists interpret fossilised footprints – by telling her about made up sexual San customs.

**Komtsa:**

A soft spoken, young man in his 20s from one of the villages in Nyae Nyae. In contrast to Joel, George, and Boyscout he had never been outside Namibia or had much contact with non-San, but he was keenly interested in filmmaking. His dry humour and carefully considered questions are responsible for much of the insight I gained during this study.

**Joseph:**

*“All we have left is the future”*

A prolific hunter in his 50s who, after the tragic death of three of the hunters in his village and the death of the village’s ‘old man’, has reluctantly become the new old man of his village. He has little faith in the future of his village but is especially concerned with the education of the village’s children.

**Christoph:**

A German tourist, 57, who has been coming to the Nyae Nyae area since 1999 and is referred to as the ‘First Tourist’ by some of the people from the village of Nhoma. He was, of course, not technically the first tourist but it was his experience in Nhoma which inspired the tourism business there. He has forged close friendships especially with Joel and Joseph.

**Matthias:**

A Swiss NGO worker who worked for TUCSIN. His job in Tsumkwe – to which he brought his whole family - was the first time he had been to Africa or given much thought to the San.

**TUCSIN:**

A Namibian NGO which aims to improve education for less privileged Namibians. TUCSIN bought the Tsumkwe Country Lodge in order to build a place where tourism and San education could come together.

**CEDU:**

The name of the project which the filmmaking workshops I offered became part of. The name, chosen by Ju|’hoan team members means “to do something over” and is meant to reflect the projects ambition to turn the hitherto ‘passive’ relationship of the Ju|’hoansi with film into an active one.

### **My own positionality:**

I come to this research as a White, European researcher. Spending several years of my childhood in Namibia, I have been aware of San images most of my life. This project was partly prompted by a realisation that my understanding of who I understood the San to be had shifted repeatedly throughout my time in Namibia and my time spent in Tsumkwe prior to fieldwork. My first significant engagement with the Ju|'hoansi was as a filmmaker and it is my background as a cinematographer that has inspired my methodology.

My positionality and cultural background doubtlessly had an impact on the kind of situations that arose during fieldworks and the conversations I was part on as well as the way in which people reacted to me. Throughout the thesis, I make an effort to explicitly comment on the effects of my positionality whenever I am aware of them.

While not every part of fieldwork always goes to plan – or even can be planned in advance – it is important to remember that events that I may have thought of as having occurred by chance are often the product of circumstances embedded in specifics of positionality and cultural background. One example for this interplay between happenstance and my own background was the screening of the three first episodes of *Vikings* which turned into a productive catalyst and conceptual framework (see Chapter Four and Five). To a certain degree, *Vikings* was selected by chance: When we wanted to select something to watch recreationally after a day of editing workshops, the Ju|'hoansi did select *Vikings* randomly out of a selection of films I had brought merely for enjoyment rather than research purposes. Presumably, watching *Pippi Longstockings*, *The Big Bang Theory*, or *Lord of the Rings*, would not have triggered the profound conversation and recognition effect as did *Vikings*.

However, as I argue in Chapter Four, part of the reason why *Vikings* is so successful in Europe and America is because of its setting in pre-Christian Scandinavia and early medieval Europe, which invites reflections on our European origin. As a European myself, I am doubtlessly subject to being affected by this. It is thus possible that the very thing which made *Vikings* suitable for comparison with Tsumkwe was also the reason I had it with me in the first place. To push this line of hypothesising even further, the fact that I named my dog, which I found in Namibia, after one of the *Vikings* characters – the determining factor in the Ju|'hoansi choosing *Vikings* over the other available films –

might already have been the result of subconsciously noting similarities between the way in which both the Scandinavian warriors and the San are popularly imagined.

#### A NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND REPRESENTATION

During fieldwork, I of course made efforts to learn as much Ju|'hoan as possible and was, after a few months, able to have simple conversations and get the gist of what people were talking about when conversing in Ju|'hoan. I also always had a translator with me to be able to discuss finer linguistic points.

More importantly, however, very few of the conversations that were ethnographically important to my research happened in pure Ju|'hoan. Firstly, many of the things I discussed with people, such as filmmaking and tourism were not part of the Ju|'hoan vocabulary. Moreover, most of the conversations I was part of happened in a mix of Ju|'hoan, English and Afrikaans, depending on what language could most easily express what was being discussed and who was part of the conversation.

Often, this merged into a hybrid language that was part Afrikaans, part Ju|'hoan and part English. I have “translated” statements that were made in this mode of speaking into clean English. Direct quotes, out of their specific linguistic context, might easily look as though the speaker were not able to express themselves coherently and clearly. This would do an injustice to people who, by and large, were fluent in more languages than I was. More importantly, however, interlocutors explicitly asked me to ‘clean up’ their English in the writing-up process.

## 2. IMAGE RUINS

The Ju|'hoansi live in a world furnished by powerful, rich and diverse images of San. Largely, these images are products of the imagination of non-San – travellers, scholars and artists from across the globe whose ideas and expectations were based on their own ideas of origin and shaped by encounters with San ‘others’ in complex historical contexts. These images are relevant throughout my thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to act as a reference and provide context for the images the reader will come across throughout my ethnography.

As I established in the last chapter, images do not necessarily need visual media to exist. Through different mediums, ranging from scholarly literature to comedic feature films, the San have been portrayed as childlike, sub-human, utopian, peaceful, savage, unrefined, wise, spiritual, religion-less, fearsome, funny, inherently noble, irrational, skilled and rational hunters, a link to our prehistoric past and a disenfranchised minority. This chapter gives an overview of some of the history of San images and how they merge together into the socio-political context of this thesis.

The history and political consequences of these shifting images has been studied and discussed by several scholars. Robert Gordon's book *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass* is perhaps one of the most convincing engagements with the many different and sometimes contradictory images of the San, particularly in reference to Namibia. His argument is primarily a political one. In the words of Karp, Gordon's book shows

that multiple images of bushmen as wild and untamable, docile and useful, fierce or beautiful have been constructed over time to legitimize a complex set of political and economic relations. (Karp, 1994, p. 961)

Compellingly, Gordon argues that the ‘Bushman Myth’ has been created to serve the political purposes of white and black settlers. Derogatory narratives around Bushmen which imagine them as not ‘fully human’ have framed them as a political underclass and marginalised them. It is because of this context, he argues, that San images must be understood politically.

Another excellent overview of how ideas about the San have changed is Barnard's *Anthropology and the Bushman* (2007). Not focussed only on Namibia but rather Southern Africa in general and less interested in contemporary political consequences, Barnard traces anthropology's changing approaches towards the study of San. He shows how the notion of Bushmen as the 'hunter-gatherer other' is deeply embedded in the discipline of anthropology.

In an article called *From "Brutal Savages" to "Harmless People"*, (1980) Guenther describes how the image held by Westerners has shifted from considering the San sub-human, animal like, and wild to romanticising them and overemphasizing their egalitarianism and peacefulness. Finally, one of the most recent examples of work dealing with San image is Adrian Strong's *Filming Real People* (2015) where he reflects both on his time working with John Marshall and on the dangers of mythic projection by filmmakers.

There is a wealth of historical information and archival material that deserves to be discussed in reference to San images. Attempting to engage with all of it explicitly would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Thus, I present here some selected examples which are particularly important to the argument I am making in this chapter and as reference points for the remainder of the thesis. While I present the examples in chronological order to provide temporal context, I want to emphasise that I am not attempting to simplify them into a coherent narrative. Although interrelated, images of and ideas about San do not exist in a structured, coherent, or linear state.

I spend the first part of this chapter pointing out moments in the history of San images that contributed to particular 'snapshots' - interpretations which had an impact on how the San are viewed. I then narrow my attention down to Tsumkwe, the place where my primary research was conducted, and its ongoing relationship to San images.

I finish this chapter by showing that all these different and sometimes contradictory images, rather than being part of a continuous chain of change, have created a pool of intermingling images. Images which were influential in the 19th century, for instance, do not entirely disappear. Instead, remnants remain and resurface occasionally or work their way into new aggregate images. In this way, interpretations and notions which originated hundreds of years ago are still relevant today and contribute to the kaleidoscopic landscape of images the Ju|'hoansi inhabit.

## Poetry and the Primitive Hunter

The image of San hunter-gatherers is rooted in the history of imagining the 'primitive'. In the notion of the 'primitive', the core problem of San studies coincides with anthropology's early efforts to establish itself as a valid discipline.

However, the opposition of 'primitive' and 'modern' far pre-dates the anthropologists of the early 19th century. As Kuper (2005) shows in *The Reinvention of Primitive Society*, dichotomies of 'primitive other' versus 'modern us' go back as far as Antiquity. For instance, the word 'barbarian' can trace its roots to how Ancient Greeks would label their uncivilised opponents, referring to what they considered their inability to speak and the animal like grunting sounds they felt they made instead: "bar-bar" (Kuper, 2005, p. 20). While it may be impossible to say at which moment in time one group first believed another to be less advanced, Kuper shows compellingly that the notion of the 'primitive' as an antithesis to the 'civilised' is deeply embedded in Western narratives of history.



Depiction of a Roman victory over the Ostrogoths. The 'Barbarians', trampled down by Roman horses and marked out by wild facial hair, look up to the superior Roman conquerors. [reproduced under Creative Commons License, ©S.Zucker, <http://tinyurl.com/yak7stx9> ]



This “exercise in self definition” (Kuper, 2005, p. 20) by which one culture was considered vaguely less civilised based on arbitrary markers experienced a shift during the Scottish Enlightenment. In lectures he gave in the 1760s, Adam Smith proposed a model of four stages of society, defining the difference through modes of subsistence (Smith, 1978).

The ‘Age of Hunters’, according to Smith was the earliest, shepherds and farmers were situated half-way up, and the ‘Age of commerce’, in which, naturally, he positioned himself was the most advanced. Barnard (2004, p. 37) argues that the notion of the San as ‘hunter-gathers’ may stem from Smith’s model of the four stages of society.

Adam Smith, according to Barnard, was unaware of the existence of people still actively hunting and gathering. His model of the primitive hunter had, however, created the blueprint of a stereotype for future scholars to use. Meanwhile, in Southern Africa, there was much confusion among European writers as to the distinction between the Hottentots, the Khoe Khoe and the Bushmen (or Bosjemen, the original Dutch word). The terms were often used interchangeably and during the 17th and 18th century, there seems to have been no discernible system or even acknowledgement of distinction (Barnard, 2007, pp. 13-15).

## 1812: THE EGALITARIAN SAVAGE



*painting of a San 'kraal' by E. W. Burchell, early 19<sup>th</sup> century [public domain, <http://tinyurl.com/y8eugsjk>]*

Not long after the publication of Adam Smith’s model, however, the first record of ‘Bosjemans’ (San) being singled out appears in the writings of Henry Lichtenstein. A few years prior, in 1801, John Barrow, the secretary of the British governor, had written about

encounters with Xhosa, Khoekhoe and Bushmen. These writings were widely translated and read across Europe but they still somewhat suffered from some inconsistencies with regards to how the people in question were termed (Barnard, 2007, p. 15). When South Africa briefly came under Dutch rule between 1803 and 1806, Lichtenstein, a German doctor, travelled the country with the Dutch governor. Like Barrow, Lichtenstein wrote about his encounters with the 'natives':

Equally untrue is the assertion that the nation of the Bosjemans is composed of fugitive slaves and Hottentots. They are, and ever have been, a distinct people, having their own peculiar language, and their own peculiar customs, if the term language and customs can be applied to people upon the very lowest step in the order of civilisation (Lichtenstein 1928 [1812]: 143) cited in (Barnard, 2007, p. 15)

Thus, in 1812, by the hand of Henry Lichtenstein, the San were put in the place carved out for them by Adam Smith in the 1760s. This first image of the San was one deeply entrenched in a notion of hierarchical structures between 'stages of societies'. On this imagined scale, the San are pictured as the most inferior, due to their hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

Even if modes of subsistence were to be accepted as an objective measure by which societies can be differentiated from one another, placing hunter-gatherers at the bottom of a hierarchical scale is indicative of the mind set with which Europeans approached them. While perhaps obvious, this is an important point to emphasise. As my thesis will show, it is a lingering attachment to this binary opposition between 'primitive' and 'modern' which remains at the core of San studies and other engagements with the San, obscuring insights and influencing development strategies.

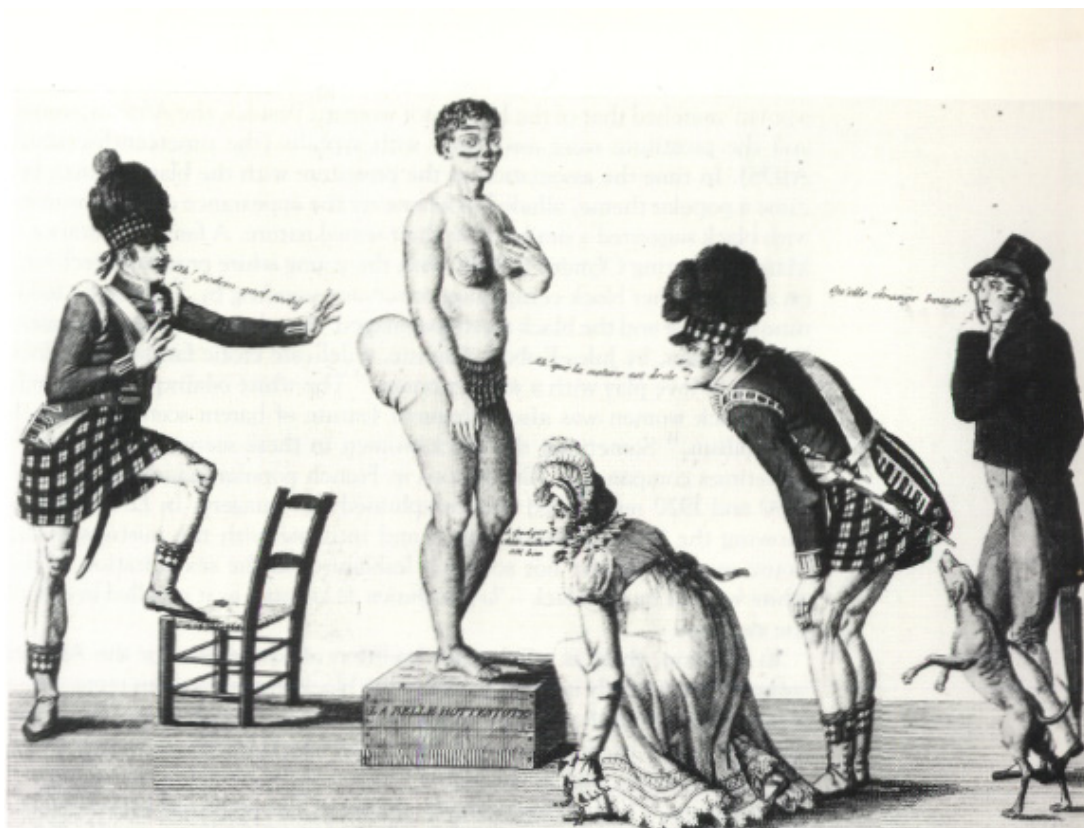
Lichtenstein's account did more than just cement the San's position at the bottom of the imagined developmental scale. He was also the first to emphasise the San's lack of hierarchical structures. The account of his contact with the San was strongly shaped by his colonial perspective. In his function as an assistant to a colonial power seeking to 'civilise' the country his work depended on political negotiations with community leaders. When he chanced upon a group of Bushmen, however, he was struck by an apparent lack of hierarchical structures, concluding that it was impossible for him to negotiate with them (Lichtenstein, 1928 [1812], p. 37).

It is more than likely that negotiations – given the circumvention of communication problems through translators – would have been entirely possible. It is unclear why Lichtenstein's party was not successful in this but contrary to his blaming a lack of leadership among the San it has since been understood that traditional San social structures are more than capable of sending representatives into negotiations. One might wonder, whether his emphasis of egalitarian structures was done to emphasise difference in a process of 'othering'.

Nonetheless, a nuance was added to the image of San which would turn out to be an interpretatively dynamic one. What Lichtenstein considered an absence of leadership was judged differently by Western cultures throughout the 20th century depending on varying understandings of state power as either underdeveloped or utopian.

### 1815: A ZOOLOGICAL CURIOSITY

In 1810, shortly before Lichtenstein's account of the San was published, a KhoiKhoi woman, today known by the name of Sarah Baartman was taken from South Africa to England where she was exhibited as the 'Hottentot Venus'.



'La Belle Hottentot' artist unknown, 19th century French print [Public domain, <http://whgbetc.com/mind/hot-venus.jpg>]

Spectators would pay to see her walked around on stage in a skin coloured suit which clung to her body and were invited to explore her physical peculiarities.

He found her surrounded by many persons, some females! One pinched her; one gentleman poked her with his cane; one lady employed her parasol to ascertain that all was, as she called it, 'nattral.' This inhuman baiting the poor creature bore with sullen indifference, except upon some provocation, when she seemed inclined to resent brutality.... On these occasions it took all the authority of the keeper to subdue her resentment. (Matthews, cited in Qureshi, 2004, p. 236)

She remained in London until 1814 when she was moved to be exhibited in Paris. She died there in December 1815. After her death, her body was dissected by French zoologist George Cuvier for scientific insight. Several casts were made of her body. Her decanted brain, dissected genitalia and skeleton were preserved. The cast and her skeleton were exhibited first in the French Natural museum and then in the Musée de l'Homme until the 1970s. In 1974 her skeleton was put into storage with the rest of her remains. In 1976 the cast followed. 19 years later, in 1995, a newly independent South Africa began campaigning for the repatriation of her remains. It took until 2002 for France to oblige.

Sarah Baartman was not the first, and most decidedly not the last human to be exhibited for the entertainment of Europeans. However, she is one of the most iconic ones (Qureshi, 2004). This is possibly due to her not being merely a nameless skeleton in the vast collection of museums and universities. Having a name and a story, she seems to capture the imagination of researchers.

An examination of the image that was created of her in its historical context illustrates attitudes towards indigenous people throughout the 19th century. Not very much is known about the specific experience of Sarah Baartman. However, what we do know is that human exhibits of 'primitives' were curiosities bound up with oftentimes sexual voyeurism and reinforced racist structures. The dissection and preservation of her genitalia, for example, was part of an ongoing fascination of Europeans with primitive sexuality.

Even though she was known as the *Hottentot Venus*, upon her death Cuvier classified her as a "femme de race Boschimanne"<sup>5</sup>. As such, she was classed as explicitly the lowest

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<sup>5</sup> A woman of the Bushman race

of human forms, straddling the line to 'apeness'. Cuvier claimed her skull resembled that of a monkey and her ears those of an orangutan. This was consistent with her treatment until then. Cuvier himself was a zoologist; drawings of her naked body were the only ones of a human published in the *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*; the man exhibiting her in Paris was an animal trainer; In London, she was walked around on stage and had a 'keeper' (Qureshi, 2004).

Throughout the 19th century, the status of San as animals was reinforced. In 1855, a group of Dutch settlers shot and ate a San, allegedly under the assumption that they were consuming an animal rather than a human (Guenther, 1980, p. 128). In accordance with their reputation as vermin, hunting permits for San were issued until 1936. An entitlement to take Bushmen to Europe and exhibit them like animals was the result of this classification.

Before I move on I want to briefly emphasise another detail of Baartman's story. Interestingly, while she was entirely objectified as a collectable curiosity in Europe, one debasement seems to have gotten lost in cultural translation between South Africa and England. Records show that in South Africa she was known as Saartje, rather than Sarah. The distinction between the two names would have been relatively meaningless in the English context. In Dutch, however, 'Saartje' was the infantilised version of Sarah. Infantilising names was a common practice in South Africa to nominally distinguish Khoi from others. This image of Khoisan as children, which Sarah Baartman was taken out of only to assume the role of an animal, is one that proved to be influential for San throughout the 20th century.

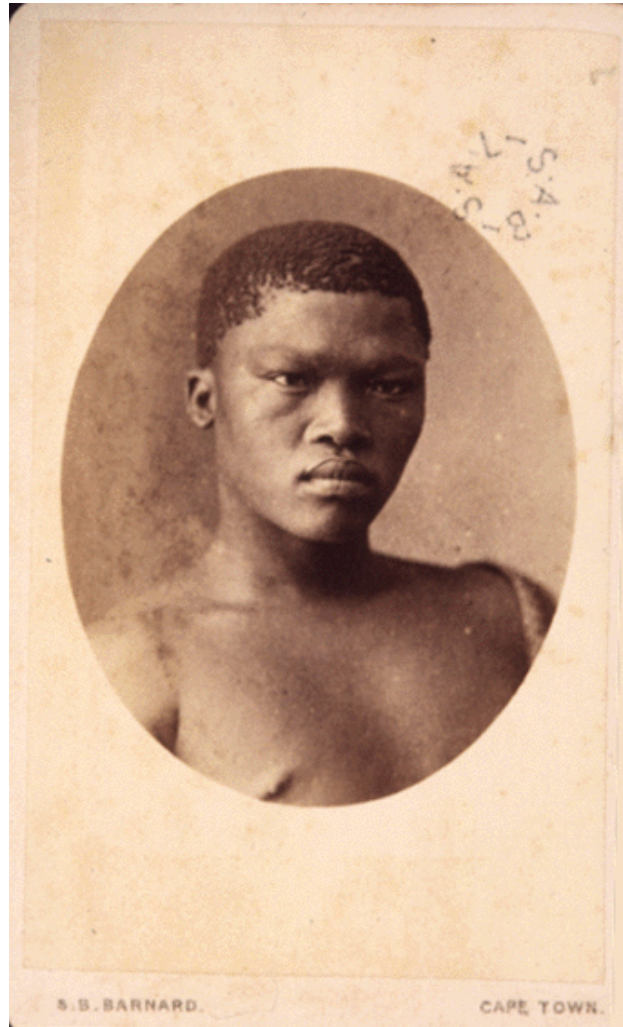
#### 1911: PEOPLE WITH A LANGUAGE, FOLKLORE AND HISTORY

In 1911, *Specimens of Bushmen Folklore*, by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, was published. Now widely known, particularly in South Africa, the publication of their work had taken several decades.

Bleek, an African grammatologist was inspired by Cape Colony governor Sir George Gray, for whom he worked as a librarian, to pursue his interest in Bushman language. Although Gray's time as governor only lasted from 1854 to 1861, their time together had a lasting impact. In 1970, due to his social connections, Bleek managed to obtain

permission to take two |Xam Bushman prisoners held in Breakwater Prison to his home in a suburb of Cape Town for the purpose of studying the Bushman language and folklore.

|A!kunta, “the best-behaved Bushman boy was selected” (Bleek and Lloyd 1911, p.443) to enable Bleek’s studies. However, he was soon joined by ||Kabbo, “the most intelligent of the old Bushmen” (ibid.) because a young man by himself was not deemed sufficient to teach the nuances of language and cultural stories.



*|A!kunta (aka Klaas Stoffel), photograph by Lucy Llyoyd in 1873 [public domain, <http://tinyurl.com/yd8bhuow>]*

The two |Xam voluntarily stayed in the Bleek household beyond the duration of the prison sentence. There, Bleek’s sister in law, Lucy Lloyd, joined his research. While Bleek was primarily focussed on |Xam language, Lloyd collected |Xam folklore and oral histories. The two worked on this task together until Bleek’s death in 1875. Since Lloyd lacked Bleek’s position and connections, she faced considerable obstacles in her efforts to get

their work published. However, she was supported in her ongoing studies by Bleek's daughters, Eliza and Dorothea, the latter of whom later became a San ethnographer in her own right (Barnard, 2007, p. 26).

Bleek and Lloyd's studies contributed much to how San were imagined. However, it is important to remember that their studies were embedded in a deeply racist and exploitative society which generally did not hold San in high esteem. For instance, with an attitude reminiscent of the above discussed voyeuristic desires to exhibit and photograph naked indigenous bodies, Dorothea Bleek allegedly complained in 1911 that "It is exceedingly difficult to get photos of the natives without their clothes on." (Qureshi, 2004, p. 249). Nonetheless, their celebrated *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* was a step towards a shifting, more complex image. Their collection of personal stories and folklore are both important documents of San history, and showed them as people with spirituality and myths. It is worth itemising some of the most important nuances Bleek and Lloyd contributed to San studies:

**Linguistic uniqueness** - Bleek's initial inclination had been that the Bushman language would be closely related to all other African languages. He soon had to discover, however, that this theory was incorrect. The |Xam language (now extinct) turned out to be drastically different from other languages he had studied. This was not only important linguistically, but contributed also to the ongoing notion of San being special or 'more indigenous' than other Africans – a sense that is evident throughout my data and will be discussed further in later chapters.

**First indication of !Kung/ Ju|'hoansi** - The two |Xam men were not the only Bushman informants of Bleek and Lloyd. They also had with them two !Kung for several years, who showed them aspects of traditional hunting techniques and whose myths were remarkably similar to those of the |Xam. This is the first indication of the nowadays established notion that 'San' is an umbrella term applicable to several language groups of hunter-gatherers. Further, it is the first mention of the !Kung, the label given to the Ju|'hoansi, whom this thesis is primarily concerned with, until the 1990s.

**A culture on the brink of extinction** – Crucially, I believe the work of Bleek and Lloyd marks the first point at which San culture is thought to be disappearing. The moment San oral culture is valued, it is so valued because it is considered to be something precious,

something that is about to disappear and needs to be saved. This is a particularly important nuance of the San image and will be of importance throughout my thesis.

**Questioning authenticity** – It is interesting to note that even during Bleek's lifetime the authenticity of the folklore he collected was called into question. It was decided that, based on the unique names for particular animals containing click-sounds, it was unlikely that the accounts had been forged by the |Xam. It is interesting to note, that even then there seems to have been an inherent distrust of the San's 'authenticity' – an issue that since then has seemed to appear whenever San take an actual part in their own representation.

### 1925: THE MISSING LINK

The Denver African Expedition, which went to Namibia in search of the 'missing link' between ape and man, contributed little new to the image of the San and achieved even less of the things it set out to do. However, it provides an example of the complexities and contradictions of San images at this time in history.

The expedition set out to capture the "last wild Bushmen". The newspaper articles and accounts that were sent back to America referred to the San as primitive "Earthmen [who] have no recognized language, beyond the simple and almost unintelligible patois which designates their simple wants... [and] no knowledge of the Supreme Being". (Gordon, 1997, p.27). A look at the participants' personal accounts of their journey, however, betrays that the people they encountered were in fact very much connected with the larger Namibian society. A group of Bushmen they found in Etosha, for instance, was, to the expedition's disappointment, wearing modern clothes and living in stone houses. When they travelled on further, they found the photograph of a Hollywood film star amongst the possessions of one of the San. Furthermore, by implication it can be assumed that there was in fact a lot of intelligible articulation going on between the expedition members and the Bushmen, considering that they were not only guided by San but also rescued by them numerous times when their truck got stuck in the mud. While mostly anecdotal, Gordon's account of the expedition shows that 90 years ago, the Bushmen this expedition encountered already lacked the pure, ahistorical culture the travellers were looking for.

The contrast between the expedition's public rhetoric and privately noted observations is evidence that even in 1925, Westerners were actively engaged in crafting an image of



the San which did not reflect their ethnographic experiences but rather sought to re-affirm pre-existing notions and ideas about the San.

#### 1956: POETIC FORCE: A ROMANTIC VISION OF CHILDREN OF NATURE

One of the most enduring and powerful portraits of San culture was offered by writer and filmmaker Laurens van der Post. While published as a series of books in 1958, *The Lost World of the Kalahari* was initially published as a BBC miniseries in 1956<sup>6</sup>.



*The Lost World of the Kalahari, part 2, h00:02*

Sat in front of a map of Africa and reproduced cave paintings, Laurens himself is the narrator of this series and he spends a substantial part telling the viewer about his connection to Africa and to the Bushmen. He talks about spending time with two old Bushmen as a child and about his deep desire to find wild Bushmen, which he explains stems from his childhood on a South African farm. He describes his strenuous but successful expedition which set out to find a group of Bushmen in the Okavango Delta.

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<sup>6</sup> Some articles and public discussion on internet forums erroneously assume that the book came before the miniseries.

He also discusses his experiences with them, and, not least of all, their love life and courting habits.

In a narrated documentary style, Van der Post introduces, among other things, the Melon Game – a game of tossing and catching a small water melon played by women – and the Bushman ‘love bow’ – a miniature bow and arrow which the man uses to ‘shoot’ his intended partner. Both are still common features of popular San images. While the Melon game is still played for tourists, miniature bow and arrows can be purchased all across Namibia.

The image which is crafted of the Bushmen in *The Lost world of the Kalahari* ties into several existing images and develops them further. In the final instalment of the series, van der Post begins by speaking about the rain and the way the landscape responds to it. Then, he talks about baby animals. Only after this, deeply embedded in the context of nature and infancy does he finally mention the Bushmen.

..The Bushmen who are so very much children of nature, who are so close to it,  
so much part of it... (The Lost world of the Kalahari, 1956)

In van der Post’s narrative, the San’s status as children goes hand in hand with their connection to nature. Throughout his body of work, Laurens Van der Post portrays the Bushmen as pure and innocent on the one hand, but also irrational and instinctual on the other.

This notion of childlike irrationality, I believe, is rooted particularly in the South African social context of the 19th and early 20th century, into which Van der Post was born, and where Khoisan in service of White settlers were referred to as childlike (remember Sarah Baartman’s South African name ‘Saartje’). Potentially, this children/Bushmen association may be linked to the practice of farmers killing adult Bushmen, thinking it was too late for them to be tamed, but taking their children into their service - a practice which several elderly White Namibians remembered and spoke to me about.

Ostensibly, Laurens van der Post speaks well of the Bushmen but his patronising approach and way of referring to them as nature’s children is significant. In his portrayal of the end of his time with the Bushmen, he suggests that they cannot understand why he has to leave. The farewell is a heavy one and van der Post reflects on a further element of his vision of the Bushmen. He points to their political plight, to the threat of their

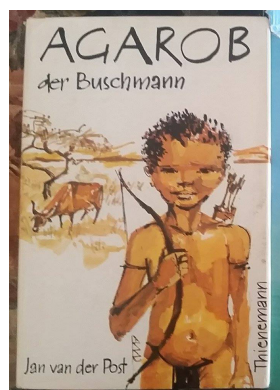
extinction, and the exploitation of their natural resources. He advocates for the protection of the Bushmen repeatedly throughout the series. Twice, he argues that if animals are protected, the Bushmen should be, too. With this comparison, he chooses to put the San on the same level as animals and other natural phenomenon, rather than humans.

While his portrayal of the Bushmen is patronising and subtly de-humanising, his work nonetheless inspired wide-spread fascination with and admiration for the San. In his films, he says that he wants to make them the gift of “giving them a place in our hearts and our imagination”. When many of his claims were debunked as fraudulent after his death, an article in the *Spectator*, fittingly titled *Small lies and the greater Truth* (Booker, 2001) argued that it was the spirit of his advocacy and tales that was important, rather than the details. His daughter quite poignantly summarised:

“What my father did was give poetic force to the Bushmen” (Smith, 2002)

There are two points about Laurens van der Post which I believe are worth noting. Despite being born South African, van der Post established primarily the British and Anglo-American understanding of the San.

A more Namibian perspective can be found in the books of Jan van der Post, which were originally written in Afrikaans and not translated into English, but into German, Danish and Norwegian. Confusingly, Jan van der Post seems not to have been related to Laurens van der Post. He spent much of his time with San hunters who inspired his books. While his first book, *Agarob*, ties into the trope of seeing Bushmen as children by making the protagonist a Bushman child, it is somewhat more reflexive about the relationships between White Namibians and San. For instance, through the lens of his young protagonist, Jan van der Post finds ways to be critical of both White Namibian and San culture without drawing general and dogmatic conclusions.



‘Agarob der Buschmann’, Jan van der Post, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1968, Stuttgart

Secondly, there is the question of who is believed to tell the truth about San and who is not. While accounts of San culture by San themselves were distrusted, as in the case of Bleek and Lloyd's collection of folklore, Laurens van der Post's tales went unscrutinised for all his life. Even after it was discovered that most of what he said about both his life and the San was unsubstantiated, his contribution to elevating the San to cult status is still appreciated by many of his readers.

Van der Post's work did give the Bushmen 'poetic force'. His account of the San idolised them as gentle and connected to nature, but at the same time subtly continued to de-humanise them.

## The Marshall Expedition and its aftermath

Between 1951 and 1961 the Marshall family conducted seven expeditions into the North East of what was then part of South-West Africa. It is at this point, that the image of the San begins to be attached to the location of Nyae Nyae in particular. In fact, it is out of these expeditions that Tsumkwe becomes an established town and a future centre of San studies research.

This section relies heavily on one of the few texts written by John Marshall, his introduction to Jay Ruby's volume *The Cinema of John Marshall*. Unless otherwise specified, the information I relay here comes from this source.

In the previous section I pointed towards a tendency for San to become romanticised both in local literature (Jon Van der Post) and in literature and film distributed internationally by Laurens Van der Post. Marshall reminds us, however, that at the time of the arrival of his family, the San were still being systematically disempowered and impoverished. Many San people's life histories were embedded in experiences of widespread and brutal killings (Marshall, 1993, p. 30).

At the same time, he admits that it was his own fascination with Africa and its myths which instigated their journey to the Kalahari. Wanting to spend time with his 17 year old son, Laurence Marshall asked John where he would like to travel. After looking at road maps, father and son decided that the Kalahari, where all roads fizzled out, would be the most promising destination. The Peabody museum, which Laurence contacted to see

whether their planned expedition could be of any use to them, suggested that they might look for Wild Bushmen' – Much in the tradition of previous expeditions and efforts to find 'real' Bushmen as opposed to those who had been incorporated into civilised society.

After meeting a group of Ju|'hoansi who spoke to them of the place they were from, Laurence arranged to return a year later with his entire family and follow them into the Kalahari to study the 'Wild Bushmen' (Marshall, 1993, p. 25).

It was not only the junior Marshall's appetite for the mythical and for adventure that attracted them to the San. The expedition has to be understood against the backdrop of the socio-political climate of the 1940s. Hiroshima, as John Marshall writes, had left his father in somewhat of a shock, and their destination was appealing both because it was remote and removed from a world deeply scarred by World War Two and because the Ju|'hoansi, thought to be inherently peaceful by the Marshalls, seemed to offer an alternative life philosophy:

After meeting Ju|'hoansi, Laurence may have begun to feel that the atomic holocaust could be prevented in the way the Ju|'hoansi stopped their fights from escalating: by mediations and mutual fear (Marshall, 1993, p. 24)

In 1951, the whole Marshall family arrived for an extended stay of 18 months. They took a diversified approach to studying the Ju|'hoansi (who at that point they still referred to as !Kung). While the expedition was supported by the Peabody museum and later the Smithsonian institute, no anthropologist could be found who would be willing to join the expedition. Thus, the task of studying the San was divided among the family.

Lorna Marshall, John's mother, was tasked with conducting ethnography. Despite her lack of anthropological training, her work on Ju|'hoansi kinship and belief was more than influential for San studies of the 20th century. Her books provided the foundations of a long and sustained interest in the San in the Nyae Nyae area by scholars from Harvard and around the world.

Elizabeth Marshall, John's older sister, who was already establishing herself as a writer, used the time in Nyae Nyae to write an ethnographically inspired book about the San in which she affectionately describes the daily drama of life in a Ju|'hoansi village. *The Harmless People*, was very successful among lay readerships. It conveyed an image of the San which epitomises the tendency to romanticise the San as the strange but peaceful antithesis to flawed Western Culture:

No Bushmen lack contact with the West and none is undamaged by it. And their own way of life, the old way, a way of life which preceded the human species, no longer exists but is gone from the face of the earth at enormous cost to the individuals who once lived it. (Marshall Thomas, 1989)

Elizabeth Marshall Thomas' interpretation of the San centred largely on the idea of an 'old way' in which people would relate to each other in a way devoid of jealousy and leadership ambitions. As recent as 2006, the *New Scientist* conducted an interview with her in which she reaffirms this viewpoint. While she points towards complexities of the lives of contemporary Bushmen, her message still builds on the Ju|'hoansi as an archetype of humanity which presents us with an alternative way of relating to one another (George, 2006).

A third product of these expeditions was John Marshall's film *The Hunters* (1957). While it was John's father Laurence who tasked his then still teenaged son with capturing filmic records, the two did not entirely agree on the approach to be taken. While Laurence believed that film could and should provide an objective record, unspoilt by interpretation or sentimentality, John felt that this would be insincere. After having collected visual material during their trips, he edited *The Hunters* with the support of Harvard University and the help of Robert Gardner.

*The Hunters* is one of the most prominent examples of early ethnographic film. Narrated by John Marshall, it follows a group of Bushmen on their hunt for a giraffe. The film predates technological advances – such as synchronous sound recording – and the creative paradigm shifts they inspired. While John would later practise an approach to filming that was more in line with Cinema Verité or Direct Cinema and later still reflexively driven films, *The Hunters* gives little voice to the San protagonists and is rather didactic.

The film has been accused of staging the death of a giraffe and falsely giving the impression of being based on a singular hunt despite being put together from footage of various hunting trips with a varying number of San hunters. Whether those are valid reasons for criticism or not, John Marshall had a different and somewhat harsher critique of his own film. Adrian Strong, who was a collaborator of Marshall's in his later films, suggests that Marshall's depiction of the hunt is very much influenced by the exhilarating fascination such an activity would have for a young man (Strong, 2015, p. 13). John

Marshall himself argues that his vision of the San was tainted by his own ideas and feelings:

Although a few shots were re-enacted to obtain close-ups, all significant events in *The Hunters* are real in the sense that the Ju|'hoansi were engaged in the normal work of hunting and were not told what to do. The ideas and feelings invoked, however, are largely my own. While I was shooting I ignored much of what was going on that was important to the hunters. I covered a whole day of tracking, resting and talking in the shade with a few distant shots and a picture of a chameleon. (Marshall, 1993, p. 36)

While he would strive to depart from this perspective in his later work, it is *The Hunters*, a film which paints an image of the San as skilled, exotic hunters, which is best known of all his documentaries and which might have had the biggest impact on the mosaic of San images.

Four main impacts of the Marshall expeditions on San imagery are worth summarising:

1. Tsumkwe was established as a locality based on the path the expedition forged through the Bush. A man who would become Tsumkwe's first commissioner when it was formally occupied by the Republic of South Africa, Claude V. McIntyre, made his first appearance in Tsumkwe as a visitor of the Marshall expedition. It would be tempting to argue that without the Marshall expeditions, Tsumkwe and Nyae Nyae would not come to be the designated homeland of the San during Apartheid and would not be the stronghold of San cultural production that it is today.
2. Because of the work of Lorna Marshall, the San were established as a culture of serious interest to social anthropologists. Her work, in many ways, represents the starting point of a highly active intellectual field of enquiry.
3. Elizabeth Marshall's work did much to cement the notion of San as survivors of prehistory and made this idea widely accessible to lay readerships.
4. Lastly, *The Hunters* gave the San an enduring concrete image in the imagination of Western film viewers, entwining their image with the depiction of a particular kind of hunt. As I will discuss later in this thesis, the hunt,

despite its limited visual appeal, is a visual trope which many of the films about San refer to.

#### 1960S & 70S: THE ORIGINAL AFFLUENT SOCIETY

After the Marshall family had established the San as a research subject through popular literature, anthropological literature, film and geographic availability, San studies began to grow rapidly. The Harvard Kalahari Research group, a direct result of the Marshall expedition's association with Harvard University, should be mentioned in particular. The group was headed by Richard Lee and Irven deVore, whose edited volume *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers: Studies of the !Kung San and Their Neighbours* (1976) covered the subjects 'ecology and social change', 'population and health', 'childhood', and 'behaviour and belief'.

Perhaps more influential than any of the Harvard research groups papers and books, however, was a theory postulated by Marshall Sahlins at a symposium entitled "Man the Hunter" (Solway, 2005, p. 65). At this symposium, and later in his book *Stone Age economics* (1972), Sahlins argued that the San were the "original affluent society". In traditional San society, Sahlins claims, people have limited needs and those needs are easily met with only a few hours of work a day. This stands in contrast, he argues, to the Western world, where people's needs are infinite and cannot ever possibly be met by the available resources.

This notion of the San having figured out the perfect mode of economy and its persistent popularity in public discourse about the San is likely more a product of its time than purely objective data. In the tradition of projecting onto the San the opposite of what we see in ourselves, the notion of the original affluent society seems to fit in well with a political climate which grew increasingly sceptical of capitalism.

#### THE KALAHARI DEBATE

The ethnographies of Lorna Marshall and Richard Lee became increasingly challenged in what would be called 'The Great Kalahari Debate' – with traditionalists on the one side and revisionists on the other. While scholars such as Shula Marks (1972) pointed towards a history of shifting subsistence modes in the 70s, it was Wilmsen's publication of *Land Filled With Flies* (1989) which caused the debate to erupt in earnest.



He challenges Richard Lee regarding his portrayal of the San as an isolated ethnic group. He argues, in summary, that what had until then been considered qualities of hunter-gatherers, maintained in isolation for millennia - such as their allegedly egalitarian structures or modes of subsistence - were, in fact, a result of the San having been relegated to an underclass:

Their appearance as foragers is a function of their relegation to an underclass in the playing out of historical processes that began before the current millennium and culminated in the decades of this century. The isolation in which they are said to be found is a creation of our view of them, not their history as they lived it (Wilmsen 1989, p.3)

Wilmsen's critique addressed issues that had been simmering amongst San specialists for a while. Both Lee and Lorna Marshall had written about the presence of other ethnic groups – chiefly Hereros – living close to the San and having relationships with them. However, outside influences on the San had arguably been downplayed. Shula Marks provided evidence of Khoe in South Africa shifting back and forth between foraging and herding modes of subsistence and challenged the ideas that South Africa had been largely uninhabited prior to the arrival of Dutch settlers. With *Land Filled with Flies*, anthropologists were split into two camps. While traditionalists - or isolationists - maintained that San groups could be analysed as cultural isolates, the revisionists - or integrationists - rejected this idea in favour of considering the San merely a disempowered underclass whose modes of subsistence were a result of their subjugation by outsiders.

The ensuing debate, headed by Lee on the traditionalists side and Wilmsen on the revisionists side, has not been satisfyingly resolved. Wilmsen's contribution no doubt provided new perspectives. The revisionists' work emphasises the entanglement with other cultures and provides room to question long held beliefs about a culture that had been subject to romanticisation and essentialism.

A dissection of the Kalahari Debate in its entirety is beyond the scope of this chapter. Further, I do not mean to side with either side of the debate here. What I do wish to stress is that the Kalahari Debate epitomises the questioning of authenticity of San culture on an intellectual level. It represents an uncertainty about the extent to which San identity has been externally constructed and to what degree 'real' San exist. While this thesis may seem to support the revisionist side, it is important to note that in its extreme varieties, a

revisionist perspective runs the risk of neglecting the experience of the people whose identity is purportedly externally constructed.

However, while the Kalahari Debate called all established knowledge about the San into question, Tsumkwe occupies a special place in it. In an article defending the traditionalist position, Lee and Guenther make a convincing argument against some of Wilmsen's more extreme points. While they explicitly admit that some San across Southern Africa have been subjected to social regulation and suppression by traders and farmers, they argue that, contrary to Wilmsen's position, there is in fact no evidence at all for there being a trade route through the Nyae Nyae - Dobe area. (Lee & Guenther, 1993, pp. 224-229). This contributes to a notion which was expressed both by non-San and Ju|'hoansi during my fieldwork; that if there are 'pure' San anywhere, they are to be found in Tsumkwe.

While the Kalahari Debate raises many important points, it is important to recognise this as a curious continuation of a distrust of San people's ethnic status. The Kalahari Debate somewhat turned the approach to San studies on its head, leaving the understanding of their identity in a precarious state. Until this point, the San tended to be both defined by and valued for their connection to what Elizabeth Marshall called 'the old way'. The revisionist argued against this one quality which had thus far defined the San.

#### FROM NYAE NYAE TO BUSHMANLAND

Its role in the Kalahari debate as an area where proof of non-San involvement is hard to obtain makes Nyae Nyae a place which epitomises San-ness perhaps more than anywhere else. Further, there is archaeological evidence to suggest that the Ju|'hoansi and their ancestors have lived in the Nyae Naye region for 20 000 years (Yellen, 1990). In 1959, after the Marshalls had established a presence in the area and tracks which led there, Tsumkwe was established as an administrative post. After the Marshall's last visit in 1961, most San ethnographies were conducted still in the same region, but on the other side of the border in Botswana.

In 1976 however, under Apartheid rule, the Nyae Nyae area was established as the homeland for San under the name of 'Bushmanland'. In the process of being declared the San's designated homeland, the Ju|'honasi lost access to 70 percent of their territory. This loss of territory included all permanent waterholes (Marshall, 1993, p. 2). Despite this loss

of territory and resources, the establishment of 'Bushmanland' meant that people identifying or identified as San from across the country were brought to or relocated to Tsumkwe. The label 'Bushmanland' officially connected a geographical location to the by this point kaleidoscopic image of San hunter-gatherers.

In 1978, in a development which would add an ostensibly political nuance to the San's image, the RSA army began recruiting Ju|'hoansi to fight in the Namibian Independence war. They were recruited for their tracking and survival skills. Being associated with the South African regime, however, was a less than favourable addition to the reputation of the San, especially after Namibia achieved independence.

In the same year, John Marshall returned to Tsumkwe after having been denied entry for 20 years. Shocked by how the living situation had worsened in Tsumkwe due to overpopulation, alcoholism and tuberculosis, he began to shoot *N!ai, story of a !Kung woman*. This film departed significantly from how the San had been portrayed until then. It challenges the notion of San as living happy, primitive lives untouched by the rest of the world.

Only two years later, ironically, comedic feature film *The Gods Must be Crazy* was filmed in Tsumkwe. Its portrayal of San as innocent children of nature, disrupted by a stray coca cola bottle gained worldwide and enduring success.

As a response to the living conditions in Tsumkwe, John Marshall began campaigning for villages in Bushmanland outside of Tsumkwe to be provided with water and started the Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative. It was his belief that the San needed to change their mode of subsistence if they wanted to survive and avoid a future as living museum exhibits. Both his efforts to help the San switch from hunting and gathering to farming subsistence and the way in which he used film for his political activism eventually led to another important, somewhat binary debate.

#### THE MARSHALL-BIESELE DEBATE

In 1996, Megan Bieseles, who had spent four years working for the Nyae Nyae Development foundation in Tsumkwe, published an open letter to John Marshall in the AAA Newsletter expressing ethical concerns about John Marshall's five-part documentary series *A Kalahari Family*. This was prompted by a 20-minute preview of the film which had been published to raise funds for the completion of the documentary

which would ultimately encompass Marshall's 50 years of intimate engagement with the Ju|'hoansi in Nyae Nyae. Biesele's concern – and that of the 18 San anthropologists who signed the letter – was that the documentary might not represent the broad range of San perspectives on the subjects raised in the film and instead be driven mostly by John Marshall's personal agenda (to promote an increase of life stock in Nyae Nyae). They also felt it might impact negatively on the Ju|'hoansi's development prospects. Specifically, the letter takes issue with the way in which the preview depicts Axel Thoma – who had succeeded Megan Biesele as the director of the Nyae Nyae Development foundation. Closer inspection of the letter and John Marshall's response, however, reveals that this was a dispute over how these two different anthropologists thought the area should be developed, with John Marshall having spent years advocating and working towards ways to help the San establish farms, and Biesele favouring an approach which was focussed more on tourism and cultural preservation. Robert Gordon (who was one of the few San anthropologists of note who did not sign the letter) writes in 2003, reviewing a full screening of the documentary at the AAA meeting that

what some see as ethical concerns others might interpret as simply self-interested behaviour that is rather patronizing if not amounting to an academic lynching. (Gordon, 2003, p. 103).

While Gordon's words might be somewhat extreme, they deserve to be mentioned in light of the fact that it is one of the few sources which actively defend John Marshall's activism. Ultimately, Marshall's influence on the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation which he had founded in 1981 disappeared. The NNDF has since brought about many impactful changes. In an article published in 2003, Megan Biesele reviews the involvement of the Harvard Kalahari Research Group has had in Nyae Nyae. In this case, as she rightly points out, anthropologists were deeply engaged in developmental activism. Three different achievements, she notes, stand out explicitly.

The first one is the successful campaigning against what was then Eastern Bushmanland to be turned into a nature reserve in 1983/1984. This nature reserve would have forced the Ju|'hoansi to give up their livestock – which at that time was an important source of sustenance – and turned the people into exhibits in what Marshall, heading the campaign, called a "Subsidised Plastic Stone Age". The second achievement was that with the support of several NGOs, the NNDF and the Harvard Research Group the Ju|'hoansi

managed to have their traditional more land use system recognised by the Namibian government. Traditionally, the San would roam an area that was attached to a more. The fact that these moresi were owned, despite the mobility of the group who owned them, stands in contrast to the common misconception that the San have no conception of land ownership. Subsequently, the Ju|'hoansi managed to defend their territory against outside intruders when the Apartheid homelands system was broken up after independence.

The third achievement is the establishment of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy itself. The Nyae Nyae Conservancy, as put by Bieseles and Hitchcock in *Cultural Survival* quarterly (2002), is a

communal land where communities have control over natural resource management and utilisation through a statutory body recognised officially by the national government.

Governed by its community, the Nyae Nyae conservancy is an impressive example of self-determination of indigenous peoples. Initially, decisions were made in attendance of “literally hundreds of people” (Biesle, 2003, p. 82). Nowadays each village sends two delegates when decisions have to be made.

In *A Kalahari Family* John Marshall makes his case for what he believes would be the most beneficial way for the Ju|'hoansi to free themselves from dependencies and poverty. In his opinion, the only way to achieve this would have been through an increase of livestock in the area. With the establishment of the cattle fund and farmer's cooperative he helped set up, several villages in Nyae Nyae were starting to rely more on farming than government hand-outs. However, with managerial changes in the Nyae Nyae development foundation, support for farmers started decreasing and resources were increasingly directed towards wild life development and tourism. While the Ju|'hoansi are still technically allowed to keep cattle in the conservancy, the number of livestock seems to have gone down drastically. The reason for this is not entirely clear.

The debate between Marshall and Bieseles about which mode of subsistence would be more beneficial for the Ju|'hoansi of Nyae Nyae has settled on the side of cultural preservation and tourism. Nonetheless, voices and initiatives advocating for helping the Ju|'hoansi further establish farming practices while protecting the area from non-San owned cattle use still resurface from time to time. For instance, throughout my time in Tsumkwe I occasionally helped George in an effort to record illicit grazing activities by

cows owned by Herero farmers (who are allowed to own cattle within the Tsumkwe city district but not the surrounding conservancy) in order for a lawyer from Windhoek to process this information and take legal action against the cattle owners.

## The kaleidoscopic image



*A picture, taken in Nyae Nyae, which is suitably evocative of the kaleidoscopic multiplicity of San images, used by several tourism platforms. © David Barrie (under Creative Commons license, <http://tinyurl.com/y9jfahp8>)*

While there are many tropes of San-ness – imagine a slender silhouette with a curved back, holding a bow and arrow roughly sketched against a sunset, for instance – there is no one universally agreed understanding of who exactly they are. The different images which I presented in this chapter did not disappear into history. Rather, they were all still present in the social interactions I witnessed and took part in between Ju|’hoansi and Non-San, such as tourists, NGO workers, and researchers in Tsumkwe. This might seem to be at odds with Belting’s argument that societies get rid of images which no longer “serve their intended purpose” (Belting, 2011 [2001], p. 10). Of course, identifying a neatly bounded society responsible for the images in question is problematic. Beyond that observation, however, one might wonder whether Belting’s theory is incorrect, and

images don't just disappear, or whether the remaining images are still there because they still serve a purpose. As my thesis will go on to show, San images serve a purpose both for researchers and NGOs, but also for the Ju|'hoansi themselves. The different images and themes from this chapter will be resurfacing in ethnographic contexts throughout the thesis. However, I want to give some specific examples here to illustrate my argument: Both outsiders and Ju|'hoansi in Tsumkwe made use of existing San images - or combinations of them - in order to make sense of and narrate their experience.

One of the most popular San images was that of the time-less hunter-gatherer. Referring - unwittingly in many cases - right back to Adam Smith's model of the four stages of society, especially tourists would often talk about Ju|'hoansi in a way which suggested that they considered them to be occupying a different age - one which they often implied was a precursor to modern society. Along with imagining the Ju|'hoansi to somehow occupy the Stone Age often came an association with the tourist's own past. To the tourists, the Ju|'hoansi were often stand-ins for their own ancestors. This way of self-definition by considering the San one's cultural forefather, as a window into what life was like before one's own ancestors started ascending the cultural ladder, will be discussed in depth in later chapters and is central to this thesis' argument. In Chapter Four, *The Pre-Archive*, I will show how this is one of the San images which draws outsiders into Tsumkwe.

Another San image that was referred to frequently during my fieldwork was the egalitarian nature of their society. This was talked about by non-San in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, NGO workers or other non-San who depended on San decision making processes and commitment often framed egalitarianism as 'inconvenient', if not negative. Often, it was asserted that their lack of leadership structures was what prevented them from participating in modern, capitalist society. On the other hand, egalitarianism was often romanticised as a more enlightened and peaceful way of being with one another.

Romanticism in its many forms - many somewhat patronising - was generally the most frequent way of talking about San and evident in statements such as:

*They are just so great, like children, so innocent (independent researcher)*

*They could not hurt a soul, it's just not in their DNA (tourist)*

*They are so deeply connected with nature, they know what's best (tourist)*

However, less loudly, but equally as frequent, were more negatively racist attitudes against the San, held primarily by non-San Namibians and South Africans, both Black and White<sup>7</sup>. In those contexts, San were talked about as irrational, lazy and not fully capable of what more developed humans were capable of. Those inadequacies were sometimes talked about as a cultural handicap and sometimes as an inherent quality of their nature. However, they also always evoked images of San which one would assume to long be outdated, framing them as missing links, not fully human, or stuck in some child-like developmental state.

There were also sometimes more specific ways in which visual tropes from the past would randomly resurface. One iconic image which Laurens van der Post introduced was the “Bushman Lovebow”. His documentary shows a Bushman in romantic pursuit of a woman crafting a miniature bow and arrow and shooting it at the intended’s behind, thus ‘claiming her’. I do not mean to argue with absolute certainty that Van der Post invented this ‘tradition’. However, I have not been able to find any mention of this practice in reputable ethnographies or seen it practiced or referred to in Tsumkwe. Nonetheless, miniature bow and arrows were often sold at souvenir outlets both in Tsumkwe and in Grootfontein, the nearest city.

Another very specific way in which I witnessed images that I would have assumed to be outdated resurface was in the singling out of the female San body as a biological curiosity. Some of the male travellers I spoke and spent time with pursued Ju|’hoan women romantically because they were attracted to what they considered their exotic body shape. More surprisingly, however, I came across a Japanese photographer who had come to Tsumkwe purely for the purpose of taking a “biologically objective” picture of a naked San woman. He spent several days looking for a Ju|’hoan woman with “a very large butt” to be photographed naked in profile, from the front, and from the back. Just like

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<sup>7</sup> This is not to suggest that Namibians and South Africans are necessarily more racist. However, while I spoke to Namibians all across Namibia, foreigners who came to Tsumkwe to visit the San were a self-selected sample which would have been less likely to hold negative attitudes towards the San.



missionaries and scientists trying to photograph naked indigenous people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, he found, to his surprise, that it was rather difficult to find a woman to agree to these terms, despite the relatively generous compensation he offered.

In instances where San were not ostensibly regarded as inferiors, their image was often caught in a tension between being idolised and simultaneously muted. This is most evident in Laurens van der Post's work where he at once instils poetic force in the image of the San and subtly dehumanises them at the same time. This tension is widespread across images of the San. Where they are spoken of as children of nature, they are implicitly denied adulthood. Where they are described as harmless, there is an underlying accusation of weakness.

The Japanese photographer was an unusual occurrence in Tsumkwe. However, the important point to take away from this chapter is that images of San do not disappear neatly. Even though anthropological and public attitudes towards San have shifted throughout the centuries, the images attached to these attitudes are still relevant today. The way in which they appear and materialise in Tsumkwe, despite following some trends (for example tourists typically seeing the Ju|'hoansi as their 'ancestors'), is not always predictable or clean cut.

Often, however, San images are a product of inferred binaries. As we learned in the previous chapter, images "emphasise what one is not" (MacDougall, 2006, p. 215). Images of others are as varied as the ideas we hold about ourselves. For instance, the idea that the San live in perfect ecological and economical harmony is still referred to by travellers and other non-San who are themselves frustrated with the economic system they live in. On the other hand, non-San who are convinced by the virtues of modernisation and development imagine the San to live in poverty and squalor.

Possibly the most fundamental binary of all, is the question whether the San exist at all or whether they are a mere figment of the West's imagination. Whoever the Ju|'hoansi are, and however much their experience of identity overlaps with that of researchers and other San enthusiasts, they are surrounded by images of San-ness which have a direct impact on their lives and their interactions with others.

### 3. MISE-EN-SCÈNE

In the previous chapter I gave an account of how San images have emerged and of the history of Tsumkwe and the Nyae Nyae region. What I discussed in Chapter One represents some of what can be found out and researched about San in Tsumkwe without ever being in the place itself. This chapter, in contrast, represents images of Tsumkwe and the San as I experienced them upon my arrival.

Apart from some historical context about the village of Nhoma, gathered during my stay there, the chapter is purely ethnographical. Where the previous chapter gave room to external notions of the San and of Tsumkwe, this chapter gives voice to my own experience of the place and the Ju|'hoansi directly. As such, my goal here is not to argue any particular point, but rather to evoke what Tsumkwe feels like, what senses it stirs, what impressions it gives.

The term *mise-en-scène*, describes how a film or theatre production is woven together through artistic choices to facilitate the storyline. It consists of all that which exists around the actors. It does not merely describe a setting, it describes the feeling and sensation a setting evokes in the audience. The purpose of this chapter is to provide such a sense of setting for my thesis. By starting with a coherent narrative and shifting increasingly into a perspective of confusion, I mean to reverse the typical direction of anthropological sense making, provide a space for appreciating the experience of not making sense, and leave the ethnography open as a backdrop for the following chapters. In many ways, adapting the concept of *mise-en-scène* for my writing emulates some of the qualities of images I established in my introduction. However, there is a purpose in this technique beyond merely wanting to liken my writing to the subject.

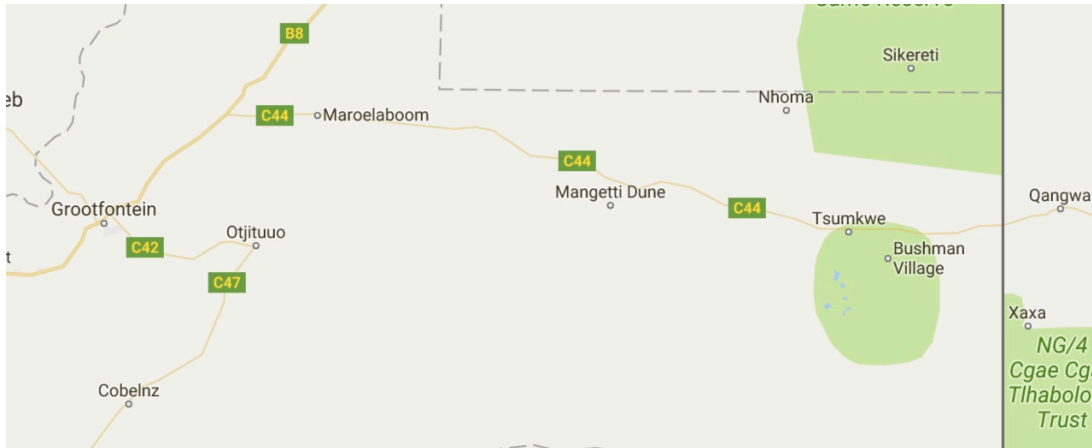
Like Anna Grimshaw, I understand my use of this originally cinematic technique as an expression of “academic caution” (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 12). The extracts from my field notes here, formatted differently to any other material in this thesis are an example of this. The extracts from my notes are evidence of my immediate reaction to the experiences described. These thoughts are not always exactly congruent with how I developed my analysis in the writing-up process but they illustrate how I first came in touch with

particular themes. If my own body and perception are a part of how I experience an image - as I established in the introduction - then my initial thoughts, shaped by the sensation of the ethnographic experience, are worth separating from later, more systematic analysis and knowledge production.

I would invite the reader, when going through this chapter, to bear in mind that my own experience had been shaped and influenced by all those images of San-ness I discussed in the previous chapter in unpredictable and unknowable ways. No ethnography can be written entirely free of one's own cultural bias. I hope that such a reading of this ethnographic account will expose a dissonance – vague and intangible – between preconceived knowledge of a place and its actual experience and simultaneously provide a rich ethnographic impression of Nyae Nyae. As I established in the introduction, each individual has the potential to revise images when encountering them, based on their specific sensate experience and body's response. As MacDougall says, "Meaning shapes perception, but in the end perception can refigure meaning" (2006, p. 2). Thus, this chapter produces an image itself – made up of impressions and stories, pre-existing images (see previous chapter) and my perception. While the previous chapter presented existing and established images of the San, this chapter presents images as I perceived them during my fieldwork and in the context of which my later analysis must be understood.

By giving sensation and image based impressions, this chapter introduces some of the other chapters' themes inside their interwoven, ethnographic context: Particular images are being actively maintained; issues of inside, outside, and remoteness and periphery shine through in my description of Tsumkwe, of the village of Nhoma and the Ju|'hoan naming system. Nostalgia and an imagined past occupy both San and non-San; there is a sense of disconnection and hostility between individual institutions in Tsumkwe; and finally, there is a sense of the Ju|'hoansi refusing to be captured in Joel's traversing of spheres, the practise of not calling out names at night, and the conservancy's unwillingness to commit to helping the Ju|'hoansi's film making project.

## The C44



*The C44 on google maps. The green area around “Tsumkwe” and “Bushman Village” is the Nyae Nyae Conservancy*

Rumour has it that in 2017, the road to Tsumkwe is meant to become a tar road. In a solitary, almost straight line, the 350km long C44 connects the western part of the Otjozondjupa region to the border to Botswana. There are mostly three reasons to take the C44. One reason would be to get into Botswana. After the border the road turns into a single lane, sandy track. To take this border one would typically be on a tour bus or an individual traveller. There are easier ways into Botswana. to cross here means that one has business in the Kalahari and travelling documents.

A second reason to take the C44 is touristic, too. The C44 offers one of the ways to get into Khaudom, Namibia’s most infamous game park. In stark contrast to well-manicured Etosha, Khaudom is known for its wilderness, boasting tracks that are difficult to drive, neglected camps and animals who are shy for fear of poaching. Khaudom is not a game park where people go to see animals - it is a place people go to experience the great outdoors of Africa. Many Namibian’s have stories to tell about Khaudom and travellers are warned never to enter alone but to always be in groups of at least two vehicles instead. Whether or not those warnings are really appropriate, one could argue that they rather suit the reputation of the remoteness which the C44 traverses.

The third, and most common reason to take the C44 is to get to Tsumkwe. Once the administrative centre of Apartheid Bushmanland, Tsumkwe is, technically, a city. Practically, it is a town which is small even for Namibian standards and home to an ever

shifting population of Ju|'hoansi San. Being Ju|'hoansi, or having business with the San is arguably the only reason to go to Tsumkwe and one of the main reasons to take the C44.

During Apartheid, it would be mostly government cars that took the C44. Today, the majority of travel along the road is done by tourists who come in search of San. Some travel alone in rented 4x4 vehicles, some in tour busses; some plan to visit several villages with a San guide and some are more than content with a day trip to a museum village and a dance performance at their accommodation.

One day, the C44 might become a tar road. Until then it is a straight, wide, gravel road across the gentle hills and slopes of the Kalahari, affording the traveller a haunting view across its vastness. Until such a time that the C44 does become a tar road, a steam roller will continue to even out the gravel road. Slowly, bit by bit, day by day - in a perpetual process that will echo through this thesis - until they arrive in Tsmkwe and start over.



*halfway on the C44 during rainy season*

#### ARNO AND THE SAFARI CAMP

Once in a while, hand made signs appear along the road, hinting at villages hidden in the bush. One of the first official road signs one sees, however, advertises “Nhoma Safari Camp” with a helpful icon of a bed to help guide the inclined traveller along. After following this road 40 km north, one finds oneself at the bottom of a sand dune with high trees and dense bushes growing on it. The track up the dune is steep and sandy. At noon on a hot day, when the air between the sand expands and makes it fluffy, one might well

not be able to drive up. On the way up the dune, the track splits. One leads directly to the village, the other leads discreetly to the “camp site”.

For anybody who has ever seen any documentary featuring the San made within the last 20 years, driving into Nhoma may well be a ‘déjà vu’ experience. Nhoma has been the site of countless films, ranging from big BBC productions to independent films. The village is particularly well suited for filming. Nhoma has particularly good links to people who might be interested in filming there and it is outside the jurisdiction of Nyae Nyae where any kind of authority - traditional or otherwise - could interfere. It is tucked away in the bush not only literally but also figuratively.

Its main appeal, however, is that Nhoma is picturesque. The clearing in the savannah is large for a San village. It is clean from any unsightly obviously modern objects. The huts people live their lives around and in are made entirely the traditional way out of grass and wooden branches. As we arrive, a swarm of children is running around, women, adorned with traditional jewellery are sitting in circles chatting and working. Nhoma provides a clean, coherent, beautiful vision of Bushman life. The only thing which might strike the informed visitor as suspicious is that the village is about four or five times as large as San villages traditionally are. This is, perhaps, a first indication that Nhoma’s pristine state serves a particular purpose.

The man behind this design is Arno. Arno is a Boer, a White Namibian descendent from the early Dutch settlers. He is Boer not only by heritage but also by conviction. He embodies many of the characteristics other Namibians often associate the Boers with - he is tough, a survivor, resourceful, grumpy and somewhat racist. Back in his home town he was once a pharmacist. Due to what he experienced as an increasingly urbanised and crowded life, he decided to go to Tsumkwe where he opened up a modest tourist lodge and a general shop, and, in doing so put Tsumkwe on the touristic map.

One of the attractions he offered for his guests was a ‘Bushman village’ close to the lodge. One of the indigenous villages had set up a few huts in the more traditional style and was offering dances and bush walks for the entertainment of the tourists Arno brought to them. With a sound knowledge of the different villages in the area, he began rotating tourist visits between them, tending, as it would seem, both to what the tourists were looking for and the villages’ needs, acting as an interlocutor.

In 1997, the New York Times wrote a scathing review of Tsumkwe, Arno's tourism business, the conservancy and the Nyae Nyae region in general entitled *In Bushmanland, Hunter's traditions turn to dust*. Condemning the San's involvement in the war for independence and simultaneously painting them as helpless victims of the political forces around them:

The group with the least say is the vulnerable, gentle, baffled Khoi-san: With the fading of their way of life, they have been relegated to the status of curiosities in a game park in which they are the top predators. (McNeil, 1997)

To this New York Times journalist, indigenous traditions were a finite, static resource which Bushmanland had all but run out of. The article is not entirely clear what it is the Bushmen have lost or how it is that every organisation and person in Tsumkwe "cheats" the tourists but it seems to suggest that Tsumkwe is somehow not delivering on something.

One year after this article was published, a man working for a legal assistance organisation in Namibia stumbled across Tsumkwe on his way to Botswana. Intrigued by the San village, he asked Arno whether there are "any Bushmen who actually really live like this" and whether it would be possible to stay in a 'real' Bushman village for a few weeks.

When I ask Arno 14 years later what he understood 'real' to mean he looks at me with a puzzled expression.

*Real is easy. It just means without any outside influence. Pure Bushman culture, walking around in the forest, no modern things.*

Although hesitant at first, Arno eventually referred the tourist to Nhoma. This genesis of Nhoma out of a moment where the rest of Bushmanland was said to be contaminated with Western influences is important. Nhoma as it is today, was born out of a need to provide something more 'real'.

From field notes 03/08/14

*"What is a 'real' Bushman village? What do tourists mean by 'real'?"*

There were several reasons why Nhoma was particularly suited to this renaissance of perceived authenticity. Firstly, Arno knew the people of Nhoma to drink no alcohol - this was, by his account, a rarity at the time. Secondly, Arno felt that the people of Nhoma were the ones living most 'traditionally' and boasted the best hunters in the region. Thirdly, and most importantly, Nhoma was not connected to the Nyae Nyae foundation who, Arno believed, were trying to exert too much control over the region, the Bushmen and his business.

On a day in 1999, Arno dropped off the tourist with a couple of canisters of fresh water and left him there for a month. The tourist, during this time, ate what the Ju|'hoansi ate, slept where they did, went hunting with them for days on end when they did and in the evening he sat around the fire with them where they asked each other questions and told stories - much like an anthropologist would have done. The project was a success. The tourist had lost a stone of weight and learned new things, the village had made some additional income and genuine friendships seemed to have been forged.

After this positive experience, Arno began to rely on Nhoma more and more for touristic enterprises. From the rising affluence, the village grew bigger and with a widening range of customers, the visits grew shorter and less personal. Other villages were bearing the mark of modernity and modern rubbish (black plastic bags draped over huts to protect them from rain, plastic bowls and canisters, which were so acutely decried in the New York Times article, lying around). Nhoma was aware - because Arno reminded them repeatedly in very clear terms - that to sustain their popularity and affluence, their image had to remain pristine. No plastic bags were allowed in Nhoma. While alcohol was fast becoming a problem, no alcohol was to be drunk while tourists were around or before they arrived.

When Arno started - and throughout most of his time in Tsumkwe - the town was not connected to the telephone line. The only way for the outside world to contact Arno was a Fax machine in 350 km removed Grootfontein which he checked once a week. With time, Tsumkwe became more and more connected, more and more organisations appeared, the conservancy gained more power and Tsumkwe started to have access to the internet. Arno, in his own words, "fled". He sold the shop and the lodge with a heavy heart and moved to Grootfontein.



Nhoma, on the other hand, he 'kept'. A short walk through the bush he built a luxury safari camp with permanent tents, comfortable beds, bathtubs and a sheltered dining space overlooking the Kalahari. The contrast between what Nhoma had become - an overpopulated sterile village with luxury accommodation - and how its involvement with tourism had started - a man staying in the village for a month while living by their rules and habits - could hardly be less pronounced.

From field notes 03/08/14

*"Are there good and bad tourists – do they want different kinds of 'real' Bushmen?"*

### THE FIRE

In 2012 some of the hunters in Nhoma were taking an Australian tourist on a bush walk. The hunters were aware that there was a bush fire relatively close by but went out anyway. This was nothing unusual. Bush fires are common and the Ju|'hoansi, especially experienced hunters, know how to navigate the Kalahari without any bush fires becoming a problem. On this occasion, however, the group suddenly found itself trapped by the fire. The hunters huddled around the Australian to protect her. The results were tragic. Three of the hunters died in hospital from their burns, and one sustained burn marks so severe that he can no longer walk for any distance. The tourist remained unscathed.

Understandably, this led to despair. All the hunters had left wives and children, in some cases grandchildren, behind. To make matters worse, the old man of the village - the closest thing the Ju|'hoansi have to a village leader - had died of natural causes not long after. The village had not only lost loved members of their group but also four of the prolific hunters whom the affluence of the village depended on. Joseph, who had lost his three closest friends in the fire was elevated to village leader and the onus was now on him and the two other remaining hunters to provide all the tourist walks, do all the hunting and perform all traditional dances.

In their frustration, desperation and rising alcoholism, Nhoma became more and more resentful towards Arno. Stories emerged that it was Arno who had forced them to go into the fire and that he had left the third hunter to die because he did not want to have a

Bushman in his car. Some of these claims I cannot comment on, others are verifiably not true. Regardless, the rift between Nhoma and Arno is deep.

As I sit with Arno now, he tells me he is trying to ‘sell’ Nhoma to a Norwegian Model who wants to turn Nhoma into something called the ‘Barefoot Academy’. I ask him what he thinks of her concept.

*Look, I don't know much about what she wants to do and I don't care. I'm sure she means well but she is going to be screwed over. Those guys are going to use her to fund their alcohol and sit around doing nothing.*

It's hard to tell how much of what he is saying comes from bitterness and hurt. Either way, the process of selling Nhoma is rather difficult. Arno does not hold the deed to the land but he did build the infrastructure and has all the contacts Nhoma needs. At the same time, it is not entirely clear which conservancy Nhoma belongs to - or indeed to any - and who, if anybody, has the authority to supply the legal backbone of the exchange. His wife worries they will never be able to sell it. Arno, on the other hand, does not seem so upset at the prospect.

From field notes 03/08/14

*"How can Arno sell Nhoma if he does not own it?"*

When I mention my interest in John Marshall he smiles for the first time. “Oh yeah, John”, he says...

*we did not always see eye to eye but at the end of the day we always had a drink together. Quite the drinker he was. And man, did he butt heads."*

He turns to me.

*That's what you need to do if you want to find anything worthwhile. Butt heads. Don't just believe what people tell you the first time. Oh, and the most important thing: always take two translators with you. Then when you want to know what was being said, you send one outside or a bit*

*away and you ask the other one to translate. Then you go to the other one and ask HIM to translate. I promise you it will be different like night and day. People don't realise you never get the full story from just one perspective.*

Some - the Nyae Nyae foundation, the new owners of the lodge and some San - argue that Arno has been exploiting Nhoma. On the other hand, it is equally as easy to see that he has dedicated his life to the village. Whether Nhoma would still exist or whether it would have been absorbed into one of the missionary stations like so many other villages outside the conservancy without Arno is anybody's guess. Nonetheless, the rift is too deep. As we will be told by one of the villagers only a few hours later in a tone that rings with sombre certainty:

*I think Arno will hang himself when he has to leave Nhoma. But he has to go.*

## Nhoma

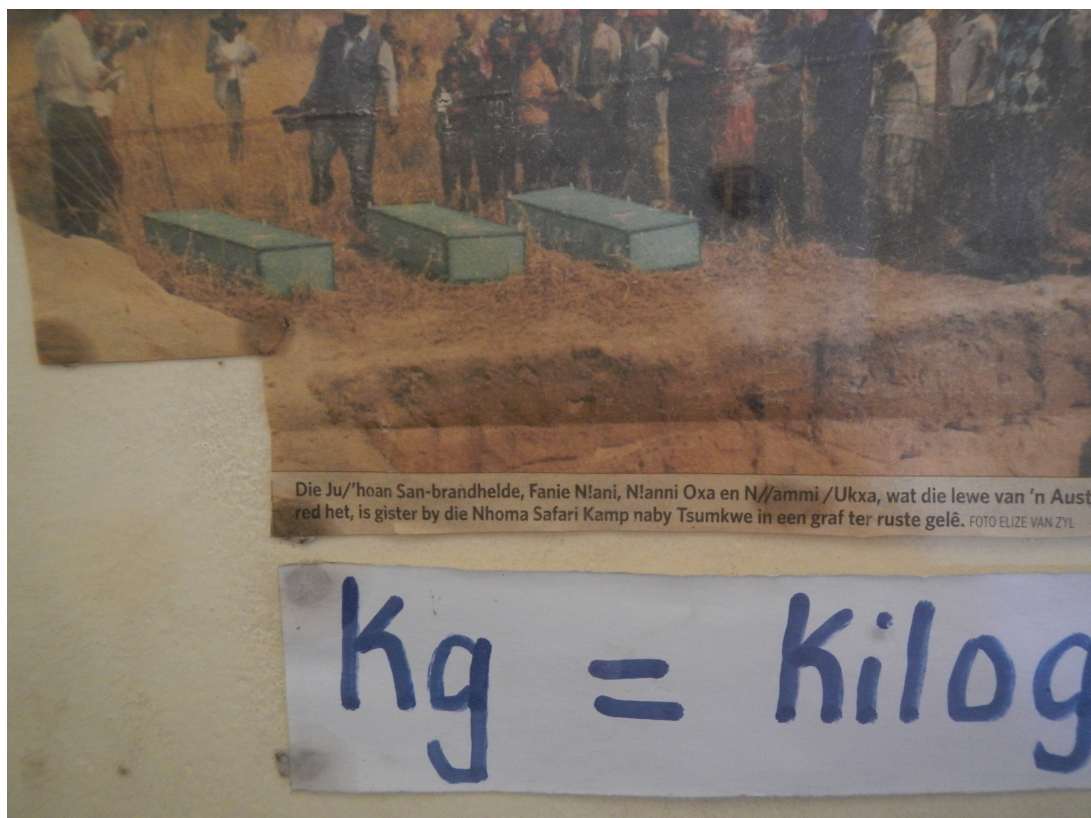


*The village of Nhoma*

After Arno leaves, Christoph, that first tourist from 1999, and I head into Nhoma. After climbing the steep hill in the Land Cruiser, we park in the middle of the village, the beautiful open space Nhoma is known for.

A little down the hill, well out of sight for visiting tourists, there is a house built by a member of the village who does not want to live in the traditional huts. Instead, he built himself a square house with a roof and a little garden where him and his family sometimes plant vegetables. Initially, as we are told, the man's desire to build a different house for himself caused conflict. After a lot of talking and negotiation which involved the entire village, however, a compromise was found and he built his house where the tourists would not be able to see it.

As we get out of the car, several of the people recognise Christoph. But it is Joseph, his oldest and closest friend in Nhoma who greets him first. Like Christoph, Joseph was a young man when they met during Christoph's first stay. Since then, Christoph has returned many times to spend prolonged periods of time in Nhoma and the two have forged a close friendship. Two of the other friends Christoph made in Nhoma died in the fire.



*newspaper image from the funeral of the three hunters kept in the village school*

This is the first time since the tragedy that Christoph has been to Nhoma and on our way to the village he admitted he was feeling guilty.

*Of course it's sad to see how touristic Nhoma has become. Even the last few times I was there, there were always these posh groups, popping in for a few hours, walking around and staring at the people like zoo animals. It's degrading. I can only imagine how much worse it got in the last four years. And now all those deaths... I feel responsible. If had never come to Nhoma in the first place, maybe none of this would have happened.*

"Unlikely", I reply. "all the villages are doing tourist business now. Nhoma is just better at it than anyone else."

"Christoph. you're an old man now!" Joseph greets him, pointing at Christoph's white beard. "So are you. I hear you are the old man of the village now" Christoph replies with sympathy in his voice.

*Yes. there is no one else left.*

The two sit down in the sand. Quickly, more people join the circle. Someone makes tea. "You got fat though!" Joseph laughs as he tries to light a cigarette with a match. The movement of his fingers is somewhat shaky and his eyes hazy as if he was hungover. Christoph pulls a pile of photos from his jacket that he had printed out, scans them, and quickly finds the one he was looking for. The picture shows Joseph, as a young man, effortlessly lighting a cigarette with one hand with a fire stick. Joseph smiles, looks closely at the picture and laughs out loud.

The next hours are spent catching up. Christoph tells them what has been going on in his life in the last few years and Joseph and Bertus (who was a young boy when Christoph first visited) tell him about their lives. Once the subject of personal lives is exhausted, the tone turns sombre and the subject of the fire and Arno dominate the conversation.

"Arno has to go" several San say. Joseph does not say this so explicitly. As the old man, it is his responsibility to hold back and measure his words very carefully. Overall, however, the village is rife with resentment and outright hatred for Arno. One of their biggest complaints, they say, is that Arno pays them in produce and goods rather than in money. Upon further probing, it turn out that this is only the case when there are tourists visiting on the day or the day after the payment. One of the villagers points out that Arno does this because he does not want them to be drunk or very hungover when tourists are

around. While nobody argues with this logic, the message is nonetheless unanimous. Arno must go. Aleks, the Norwegian model will turn the village around.

The specifics of what Aleks is going to do are not quite so clear. There is talk of a Jul'hoansi led tracking school and eco-tourism. When I ask what it is they most want from Aleks, the message is much clearer. They want houses they say; proper houses with electricity and water, a little bit away from the village. Then, they explain, they could take it in turns to provide the indigenous San experience for the tourists and live their own life in privacy - a concern I find easy to understand.

From field notes 03/08/14

*"Would Nhoma lose authenticity if people weren't living in traditional huts?"*

#### THE FILM SCREENING

Christoph and I go to the car to have a nap and rest through the blazing midday heat. As we get out of the car, the village is all but deserted except for a few children who are playing between the trees and a couple of elderly people who are sleeping in front of their huts. Both of us unsure what happened, we start walking toward the north side of the village where a path leads down the dune to the unorthodox house.

On our way we are met by several people who are weaving up the dune, laughing, giggling and shouting. They greet us with a friendly smile and walk past us. More and more people are emerging through the bush the closer we get to the little platform the house sits on.

When we get there, people are already much too drunk to realise that we are even there. A man, who it is exactly is difficult to say in the twilight, is dispensing cups of some liquid from the back of a pickup truck. We ask one of the men next to us for the going rate of a cup and give him the 10 Namibia Dollars to get us one. The man disappears towards the car and at the same time we spot Joseph. He, too, is drunk but he does recognise Christoph.

He seems mortified. Staggering, he walks over to him, puts his arm around his shoulder and says with an accent heavier than normal "Let's go". We move back up the path - eventually followed by most of the others. Joseph has to catch his breath several



times to make it up the incline. A little later we have prepared some rice with soy mince and sit in a circle. Joseph whispers something to Bertus in Ju|'hoan. Bertus translates.

*Joseph wants to know if you are thinking very badly of us now.*

“No, of course not”, Christoph replies, as earnestly and gently as one would think he could express anything.

*I have known you a long time. Nothing could make me think badly of you.*

For a moment, there is silence. “Did you say earlier you brought some John Marshall films?” Bertus asks me.

“Maybe that’s not a bad idea”, Christoph says to me in German “I think Joseph and some others are embarrassed and it might dissipate a bit if we all watch a movie together”.

I suggest to the group that we could watch *The Hunters* and everybody seems keen. A small crowd gathers in front of my laptop. The speakers are not great but it seems the sound is not so important anyway. Soon, the older people, especially the remaining hunters, explain the hunt in Ju|'hoan to the children who are watching with their eyes firmly fixed to the screen.

This evening tales of hunts are told around the fire and the chatter and laughter continues long into the night. I notice Christoph has been quiet for a while and he looks a little sad. “It’s Joseph.” He explains in German,

*This morning he seemed so defeated and downtrodden and I think he will look like that again tomorrow. But right now, for the first time he looks like the man I first met... He looks like a hunter. It’s just sad that he cannot always feel like this.*

I look over to Joseph and notice, perhaps due to Christoph suggesting so, that he is holding himself remarkably different than this morning. There is a tension in his body that speaks of athleticism and quiet confidence as he playfully shows one of the boys how to hold an arrow – a picture perfectly suited to be trivialised into the trope of the noble savage.

From field notes 03/08/14

"NOSTALGIA???"

When we leave the next morning, we drive past Joseph and all the school-aged children of Nhoma walking down the road. Every Monday he walks them to the 20 km removed school and every Friday he picks them up. He says there is no future for him or for Nhoma, but the next generation can still have a future if they go to school. Even as a young man, Christoph tells me, Joseph had a knack for looking after children. Now that he is the authority figure in the village, they remain his main priority.



*stills of videos of Joseph and his family, shot by Christoph in 2002 (reproduced here with permission of subjects and photographer)*





*Joseph in 2014*

A very different way of responding to the development of Nhoma can be observed through Joel. Joel, like Joseph, was born and grew up in Nhoma. He loves the Kalahari and the traditional life style, and can get giddy at the sight of a good bow. Still, he has never applied himself enough, like Joseph has, to learning the art of tracking to become prolific enough at it to be considered a hunter. Instead, Joel has carved himself a niche as an independent networker and tourist guide.

From time to time he will work for Arno, sometimes for the Tsumkwe Lodge and often he will spend long periods of time working for individual researchers or travellers. He is a networker, with a smart phone and a tablet. But he is also a player. He has a wife and several children but he routinely and openly flirts with other women whom he somehow manages to keep separate from one another.

While he is originally from Nhoma, he has built a house in Tsumkwe (being such a prolific networker he is one of the more affluent San there). Whenever he can, he goes back and forth between Nhoma and Tsumkwe. But while Nhoma is the place where he feels at home, it is cut off from the mobile network and far away from the networking opportunities of Tsumkwe. More significantly yet, Nhoma is not within the borders of the Nyae Nyae conservancy. Members, that is to say, Ju|'hoansi residents of the conservancy, get a share in the conservancy's annual income (this usually works out around 1000 Namibia Dollars per person) and in order to receive this he has to have a house in Tsumkwe. Professionally, romantically and geographically Joel moves effortlessly between the spheres, always managing to coordinate conflicting parties around one another.

## Into Tsumkwe

Driving the last 80 kilometres from Nhoma into Tsumkwe, one might easily miss the sign that informs the traveller they are entering the Nyae Nyae conservancy.



But even though it is easy to overlook, the differences between being inside and outside Nyae Nyae are significant. San who live inside the conservancy share in the conservancy's profit. San inside the conservancy are typically Ju|'hoansi, San outside the conservancy typically identify as !Kung. There is a notion among San both inside and outside of Nyae Nyae, that the San in Nyae Nyae are somehow especially 'San', that they are the San who have been here for many thousand years while the San outside are those from all over Namibia who moved here during Apartheid<sup>8</sup>. It is on this basis that Nhoma feels they should be part of Nyae Nyae. The people there are exclusively Ju|'hoan and all have close family relations to people in Nyae Nyae.

From field notes 05/08/14

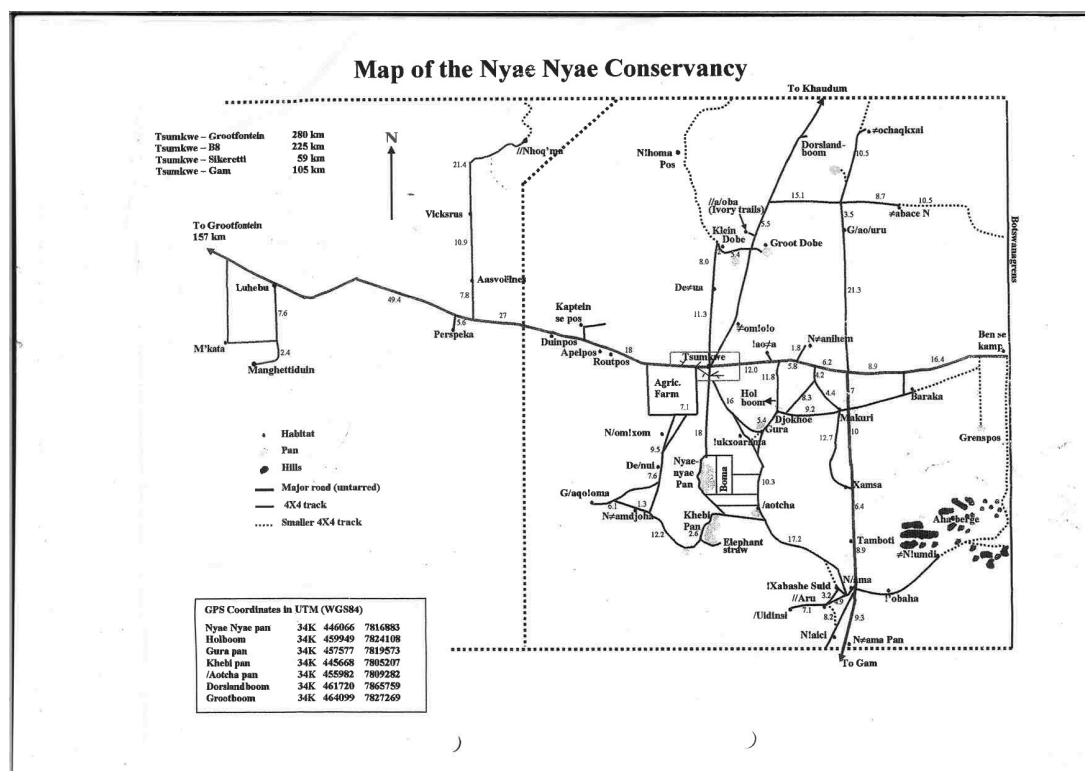
*"Is there inter-San racism? What does that say about San identity?"*

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<sup>8</sup> During my stay, I got the impression that this notion was unsubstantiated

As the sign is meant to indicate, tourists are supposed to pay a small fee when entering the conservancy. The fee is payable in Tsumkwe at the conservancy office. However, very few visitors know of this fee and even fewer go through the effort of paying it. Similarly, there is a fee for filming, which even fewer applicable people pay. The conservancy does, however, have other sources of income (mainly selling trophy hunting rights). It is from these resources that the members are paid their annual share.

To qualify for this share, one has to live in Nyae Nyae and somehow prove that one is San. As I am told at the office, whether or not one is San enough to qualify is normally obvious if, for example one has the visual characteristics and speaks the language or is related to an existing member of the conservancy. A person might also qualify if they are simply married to a San person and speak the language. While the sign is addressed to tourists, it is the San and other Namibians this border is most significant for. Inside the conservancy, non-San are not allowed to settle without explicit permission from the traditional authority. Inside the conservancy, those identified as San are allowed to hunt and share in the communal resources.



A map of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy. This is the main map being used in the area. It was made by Arno, based on a map of the area he had made himself when he started to rotate tourists between different villages

Tsumkwe, on the other hand, is another matter. While surrounded by Nyae Nyae, it is the administrative centre for the entire region, the district capital of the ‘Tsumkwe electoral constituency’.

The city of Tsumkwe boasts a high school, a court, a solar power plant, a community centre, several governmental buildings, seven churches, a library, an IT centre and many more luxuries. However, only very few people live here in permanent houses. The vast majority of Tsumkwe’s population lives in little huts or mud houses with occupants being in constant flux between inside and outside Tsumkwe. After asking several institutions whether they could tell me how many people were living in Tsumkwe I finally asked George, one of the best known tourist guides in the area. His response was that he did not know and that if I found out I should tell him because he had been trying to find out himself for years now.

From field notes 18/08/14

*“How, where when and why do people  
migrate through Tsumkwe and why is it  
impossible to find out how many people live  
here?”*





from google maps. 1= Shop and fuel station; 2=community centre, largely unused; 3=conservancy office and crafts shop; 4= secondary school; 5= government buildings, many empty; 6= solar power plant; 7=hotel for locals; 8=Tsumkwe Lodge

## Names

On the Monday of my second week in Tsumkwe I heed George's advice and plan a visit to |aotcha. Even though the way is only roughly 30 kilometres long, it takes Eliza, Joel and me the entire morning and the better part of the early afternoon to get there. The road is sandy with many climbs, and leads across swamp land and through thick bush. After being delayed by a puncture, we arrive at around 3 o'clock. Half-way to the village we were met by the chief's car, carrying about 15 people to Tsumkwe. After our ordeal of

getting to the village I am left wondering how an ordinary car could ever hope to make this journey.

|aotcha looks very different to Nhoma. A couple of cows are roaming the area, as well as a handful of chickens. A cement building sits in the middle of the village grounds. The rest of the houses are a mixture of the traditional huts made from tree branches and some that are subsidised with metal and plastic. It is mostly the women who meet us in the circle, most of the men have left in the car we met on our way to the village.

As we sit down, the first thing I notice is a woman who seems to be extremely old and I vaguely seem to recognise her from John Marshall's films. When we are introduced I realize that she is in fact the wife of deceased ≠Toma, the main subject of John Marshall's documentaries and famed 'chief' of the Ju|'hoansi.

"Can I take a photo?" I ask. "No" is the straight and firm answer. I am surprised. While I rarely take photos, this is the first time in Nyae Nyae that someone refused to be photographed. I am intrigued and want to know why but feel that it would be disrespectful to push the point. The firmness of her answer has made me feel inappropriate and I feel that the best way to make up for this is by accepting her refusal without any further questions.

I introduce myself and tell the group a little about my research project. In the absence of her husband, ||Uce, the current chief's wife, seems to be taking on the responsibilities of the village's old person - at least it is her who answers most of my open questions. However, as always in Ju|'hoansi group situations this does not mean that everybody else does not get to say anything. By now I know that there is a certain format to these encounters which has to be followed. I, the White outsider, have to ask the group questions about their lives and they answer. When I later ask Joel why this is always the format he explains:

*Maybe sometimes it's because people are bored. They have nothing to do, so everybody joins the circle to see if there is maybe something entertaining.*

George has a different view on the subject.

*It's what they have been trained to do. The anthropologist comes, they sit,  
they ask questions, they get the tea and sugar. Its been like that for 50 years.  
It's in the people's blood.*

Either way, I follow the protocol and ask questions. 'How many people live here?' Maybe around 40. 'What's up with the cows?' They used to have more but the young people keep selling them to buy alcohol. 'Is the water pump working?' No, it is not. This particular water pump is property of the conservancy which has inherited it from the cattle fund. Thus, as opposed to the water pumps installed by the government, the government has no responsibility to fix it. It has been broken for several months. 'How do people make a living?' There are the pensions, the annual conservancy share and of course the *Devil's Claw* project. Back in the days of Arno they would sometimes get tourists but today they do not seem to be on the rota anymore. They are very resentful of that. What is more, back in the days, John Marshall would sometimes help them by buying jewellery from them.

As the subject of John Marshall comes up, the conversation grows more lively and starts flowing more naturally. After all, this used to be the village where John Marshall spent most of his time. John Marshall, they say, used to buy jewellery despite the fact that he would obviously not wear it. He would take it to the US and give it to someone, maybe his wife, or sell it on. A few of the women nod nostalgically. Megan Bieseke, on the other hand, "she would never take any jewellery". This is disrespectful, one of the women explains. "Maybe she does not want to wear it but she can still take it and then give it to someone else". The academic divide between camp Marshall and camp Bieseke is part of reality here. While the village still enjoys a certain amount of prestige and power because of its association with chief Bobo, the people of Jaotcha feel betrayed by the conservancy.

Since we will have to spend the night in the village I point out that I have a few of the Marshall documentaries with me and that we can watch them later. As I say this, the group seems to be interested in what I am saying for the first time. They ask me what exactly I plan to do and how long I will be staying. Someone says that if I will be staying for a year I need to get a Ju|'hoan name and that they will give me one.

Everybody in Nyae Nyae is related to one another. This is not only achieved through blood ties but more importantly through a system of guardianship whereby a member of

the village “gives” their name to an incoming outsider (Marshall, 1957, p. 25). The outsider thereby assumes quasi relationships with the people the guardian has actual relationships with.

The group discusses among themselves who would give me their name. It is almost decided that a woman called Nai will lend me her name when someone interjects something. A heated and quick discussion in Ju|’hoan begins which I am not able to understand and which happens to quickly for Eliza to translate word by word. As she summarises, the woman who offered to give me her name is also the guardian of Megan Biesele. Since I showed such an interest in John Marshall and offered to watch his films together, they decided I should get a name which symbolically relates me to him. ||Uce, George’s mother, the wife of chief Bobo whose father was John Marshall’s name giver volunteers. “You are John Marshall’s daughter in law now” Joel says, joking. I am happy with that. What is more, the old woman now agrees to have her photo taken with me.

Later in the evening, Joel, Eliza and I have pitched our tents under one of the big trees. It is already dark when we prepare the showing of the film. I am not sure what the procedure is, seeing as the village has dispersed into smaller groups for dinner around the individual fires. “Do you know where Joel is?” I ask “No idea. Maybe over there” Eliza replies. “Maybe I should call him” I conclude and take a breath to call out his name “Jo...” But Eliza stops me sharply. “No, you can’t call his name”. Again, I feel awkward and inappropriate.

Together with Joel (who we retrieve without calling his name) Eliza explains to me that you may never call a person’s name at night. The evil spirits which wander the earth at night might otherwise be able to find them. Once they know the name of the person, they can ‘see’ them and tag on to them.

“Is it only the birth name one may not call or also the other ones?” I ask. My question refers to the fact that all Ju|’hoansi have several names. At least one English name, one Ju|’hoan name and as their life develops also nicknames and names they are given by guardians, for example if they move to another village with their spouse. Similarly, Ju|’hoan people also increasingly change their English names on a whim. Eliza, for example, is also called Cassy and Beth by own choice depending on the social context. But as the two explain to me, all names are equal. No name is more powerful in attracting the



spirits regardless of whether it was the first name of that person or whether it's a Ju|'hoan name or not.

From field notes 25/08/14

*"Are names synonymous with identity? If so,  
what does that mean?"*

## Disapproval of Ju|'hoan Filmmaking

Finding people who wanted to try their hand at making films was easy. Actually delivering the workshops in a way that was agreeable with Tsumkwe, however, was another matter. Between Eliza, Joel, George and me it quickly emerged that we would have to become a 'project' and go through the processes this entails. This meant to seek permission from the proper authorities and introduce ourselves at the annual general meeting of the conservancy. Our first stop, we decided, should be the traditional authority of the conservancy, represented by the conservancy council.

Waiting for our turn to make our case, Joel, Eliza and I sit on a concrete bench in the shade next to the crafts shop. The crafts shop is run by the conservancy. Women from all across Nyae Nyae can sell their crafts to the shop which either puts them on display there or ships them away to the Windhoek office to be sold in the capital and abroad. Despite the decent number of tourists who travel through Tsumkwe and stay at the lodge, the shop sees very few visitors on a day to day basis. In fact, during my entire stay I saw only one customer – an 'individually travelling' tourist to whom I had mentioned that he needs to pay a fee to come into the conservancy when I met him in the bush. Nonetheless, the office is always staffed with Ju|'hoan women.

While we are waiting for our turn they hang out with us. "What are you going to see the conservancy for?" one of the women asks. Eliza explains that we want to offer filmmaking courses.

*Oh, that's a great idea. Do you have to speak English?*

As Eliza explains to her that no, she would not have to speak English, the woman's face lights up. She asks to be signed up for the first lesson.

Encouraged by this encounter we enter the office optimistically. The room is dark, an air conditioner is rattling and about a dozen people are sitting in a circle. We sit down on three empty chairs and make our introductions. Joel looks at me and signals that I should start explaining what we want to do. "English or Afrikaans?" I ask Joel. "Doesn't matter", Joel says. "They only speak Jul'hoan anyway so I must translate and then they discuss". Again, I give the pitch of what we want to do and who is involved. After Joel has translated they discuss for a while. "They think it's a very good idea." he summarises. "Ok", I say, unsure what the next step is. "Will they support us?" Again, Joel translates and the committee discusses for a while. "They ask what you want?"

Already I feel uncomfortable being singled out like this. I consider pointing out that turning this into an official 'project' was not my idea but rather George's, Joel's and Eliza's. "Well, to spread the word, support us. Also, we need a place where we can hold the workshops" I decide to say instead. Again, Joel translates, the committee discusses for a while.

*Joel: "Where do you want to do the workshops?"*

*Me: "How about in one of your buildings?"*

Translation. Discussion.

*Joel: "They say they are worried if something gets stolen because a lot of people go in and out here."*

*Me: "Ok, How about that house over there?"*

Translation. Very brief discussion.

*Joel: "That is the foundation's house"*

*Me: "But nobody lives in there?"*

*Joel: "They stay there during the AGM"*

*Aglaja: "Ok, how about another place in Tsumkwe?"*

Our suggestions and their counter arguments go back and forth for a while in a repetitive format. We suggest a place, Joel translates, they discuss and we hear a reason for why we cannot do our workshop there. Finally, we suggest an old building site just outside of Tsumkwe which is not used but potentially has access to water and the towns electricity. After Joel translates this suggestion and the committee discusses for a while, the retort is

*No, you cannot go there because of the water buffaloes. Sometimes there are water buffaloes there and they are protected.*

As Joel and I put our heads together to come up with yet another suggestion, Eliza leans towards me and says in German:

*This is pointless. They just don't want to commit to helping us.*

From field notes 05/10/14

*"Remembering Arno... Am I "butting heads" yet?"*

As we leave the conservancy office, Eliza is visibly shaken.

*I can't believe it. We offer them something that doesn't cost them anything where they don't have to do anything and they just get something cool like this for free and they want to block us because they are afraid of the foundation.*

"What do you think?" I ask Joel.

*Yeah, I think they want to wait for the foundation.*

When we discuss this later with George he has a more cynical view:

*They don't want anything that doesn't come from the foundation. They will only commit if the foundation in Windhoek is responsible. If the foundation*

*says yes, they say yes, if the foundation says no, they say. Why do you think we are not on the council.*

Since the conservancy has the power to grant us use of their own buildings in Tsumkwe and of land in Nyae Nyae but not technically of any other space in Tsumkwe (as we learn after our meeting) we decide to go to the commissioner and ask how to get to a piece of land we can build something on. The commissioner is San as well, but from the neighbouring area. Like the council, he blocks all our suggestions. He says that even to buy a piece of land the application process would take years.

While the conservancy and the commissioner put actual obstacles in CEDU's way, the mere concept of what we were trying to do was not well received in other institutions. While Matthias, a local NGO worker for TUCSIN<sup>9</sup>, was excited about our ideas he had very little power over TUCSIN's support for us. After we designed a plan together detailing how what we wanted to do could merge productively with TUCSIN's ambitions, I went to Windhoek to present this plan to the organisation. TUCSIN, however, did not see the need for the San to make their own films.

While TUCSIN was disinclined to support us, outright antagonism came from a German researcher who had recently made a film about some of the San coming to Europe to read tracks in an ancient cave. Since Boy Scout was part of the team who had helped him with his project and was in his film *and* involved in building the CEDU centre we got in touch with the researcher once we heard he was coming to Tsumkwe to show his film. Initially, he happily accepted our invitation to watch the film together. A few days later, we received another email, informing us that they did not want to be openly associated with us. "As you know" the letter read in German "I am extremely critical of your project". The letter further emphasised that they were there in partnership with TUCSIN and the conservancy, not with us.

Strangely, the narrative of the email seemed to position us in opposition to TUCSIN and the conservancy despite the fact that we had shown our wish to cooperate with both at every possible step of the way. We later found out from Matthias that between our first email exchange and the second email, in which the tone notably changed to one of

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<sup>9</sup> Namibian educational organisation which bought Tsumkwe Lodge just before I started my fieldwork who positioned themselves as the new big developmental player in Tsumkwe

condescension and rudeness, the researcher had been in touch with TUCSIN. However, this contact had not been part of an ongoing relationship as was being suggested in the email but rather was a first contact.

This was by far not the only disapproval of our project expressed to me through email. Once details of our project were online, I received several unsolicited emails, tweets and Facebook messages informing me that I personally was ‘ruining San culture with my egocentric attempt to involve them in the Western medium of film’.

From field notes 30/10/14

*“Why are NGOs SO HOSTILE towards film workshops?”*

One of the most direct attacks on our project happened entirely out of the blue and was conducted by a San. I was lying in my tent one morning at 8 o’clock when I heard the dim sound of my phone ringing. Still largely asleep I retrieved the phone from under my dog and answered it.

*Good morning?*

“Hello, is this Aglaja speaking?” The voice had a strong Namibian accent.

“Yes....” I replied.

*This is the Namibian Office of Information*

Now I was wide awake. “Ok...” I said, already wondering what I was about to be evicted for.

*We have been told that you are filming a movie in Tsumkwe without a permit from our office.*

Technically, anybody who is not Namibian filming anything in Namibia has to apply for a very costly permit. In practice, very few filmmakers bothered with this since it was hardly policed. More to the point, however, I was not making a movie.

“I am not making a movie.” I said.

*But our sources say you are*

“Well, who are your sources?”

*Never mind that. Why would they tell us you are making a movie if it's not true.*

“I don't know.” I replied. “I am here in Tsumkwe with a permit from the conservancy doing research. While I am here I am offering some people to use my cameras so they can make films. All the people who are making films with my cameras are San and they are making them for their own use under their own copyright.”

Fortunately, this satisfied the officer from the Namibian Office of Information. I immediately sent some texts to Joel, George and Eliza so they could find out who was behind this. By lunch, Joel and I were on our way to the village of ||a|oba.

We knew who the call had come from: A man by the name of |Ui who was originally from the neighboring conservancy and had moved here because of his wife. He was involved in several developmental projects all over the place. Why exactly he had called the ministry of information we did not know.

Once we got to the village, we had to decide how to approach the situation. Intuitively I felt that it would not do to send Joel in to tell |Ui off. From having observed conflict resolution among San before I also knew I could not go to the man directly and have a private conversation with him. Anything the man had done was the villages business and the village had to be included in the resolution. At the same time I could not publicly shame the man.

“Just explain to everybody the CEDU project” was Joel's solution. He explained that I should not refer to what |Ui had done but that I should re-affirm what our view was to give him and the village a chance to agree with us.

“WHY ARE THE SAN RESISTANT TO EDUCATION?”

Still early on during my stay in Tsumkwe, I spoke to a lady who had long been involved with both TUCSIN and the San. It was partly on her behest that TUCSIN had acquired the lodge to turn into an educational center. One of the evenings of her stay at the lodge I had dinner with her. After hearing about my anthropological background she asked in a

soft English accent that seemed to have remained unchallenged by her life in Southern Africa:

*So tell me, why is it that the San are resistant to education?*

I do not remember what I responded. I did, however, write the question down in my notebook that evening and circled it. It took me a while to fully appreciate what was behind this. Initially I took the question to merely mean “Why do the San children not go to school despite being given so much opportunity and help?”

This might very well be what she meant by this question. However, it also echoed something I heard repeatedly by NGO and government workers: Why is it that despite all the money spent on Tsumkwe by the government, NGOs and tourists, despite all the projects and all the commitment, its key problems - poverty, alcoholism, and low school attendance rates - persist?

In one of the first exercises we did in the film workshops, I asked the groups to make short films about Tsumkwe. While the participants were always eager to make films about traditional San life, this exercise was meant to provoke engagement with Tsumkwe’s socio-political climate.

The results were enlightening. All films were critiques of particular aspects of life in Tsumkwe. Subjects covered alcohol abuse, loan sharks, problems with schooling, and stealing. Even more impressively, in many cases the films were made by a group that was likely to be perpetrators of those problems.

**Group A**, consisting of three boys between the ages of 15 and 17, made one film about young people stealing money from each other and one film about a young person abusing the pension of their elderly relative who is then driven into the hands of a loan shark. I know from one of the boy’s fathers that they have not only passive experiences with these techniques.

**Group B** consisted of one San and two non-San. They made a visually impressive film about alcohol abuse. All three drink frequently and one profits from one of the Shebeens – places where alcohol is sold, almost all of which are owned by non-San.

**Group C** consisted exclusively of women. They made a film about why children are not going to school.

What was striking, was the fact that the Ju|'hoansi seemed to overall agree with the large body of organisations on what Tsumkwe's problems were. As one government worker explained to me: "Alcohol. Education. Stealing. In that order". The somewhat random people in our workshops had a keen insight on what the origin of those problems were. NGOs, similarly had a very firm grasp of what they thought the problems were and what, they believed, should be the solution. In theory, this should have been the basis for a productive cooperation between Tsumkwe and development workers.

From field notes 03/08/14

*"Why don't development efforts 'click'?"*

The question I set out to answer originally in my research was why there was such a wealth of contradictory interpretations of San identity in scholarly literature and what, instead, indigenous categories of San-ness were. My first few weeks produced a flurry of additional and less straightforward questions: Why was there so much resistance to the notion of indigenous led film despite the fact that film was already a deeply embedded part of San life in Tsumkwe? Is it really education that the San are resisting or are they resisting something else and how are they doing this? Why are development projects so relatively unsuccessful when the Nyae Nyae conservancy is considered to be one of the most successful indigenous governed areas? Why, at the same time, were the film workshops I wanted to offer to people, turned into a project to fit in with the dysfunctional 'development scene'?

Throughout this chapter, images, pictures and film have played a crucial role in the interpretation and outcome of social events. In Nhoma, this was apparent in the picturesque quality of the village itself, the necessity to keep up appearances, Christoph's and Joseph's remembering of past selves with the help of photographs, and the village's reaction to watching *The Hunters*. In |aotcha, photographs were a point of contention and



the memory of John Marshall opened up paths of communication. In Tsumkwe, however, and the international online sphere, the notion of San making their own films was greeted with suspicion and resistance.

The remaining chapters of this thesis focus on themes which emerge from the above ethnography – images of an imagined past; multiplicity and the traversing of different spheres; the disconnect between NGOs and the Ju|'hoansi; and how Ju|'hoansi curate 'outside' spaces in which identity can be creatively 'played' with.

## 4. THE PRE-ARCHIVE

*Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.  
What might have been is an abstraction  
Remaining a perpetual possibility  
Only in a world of speculation.  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present.  
Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-garden. My words echo  
Thus, in your mind.  
(T.S. Eliot)*

The above poem – or section thereof – by T.S. Eliot, published in 1943 is cited almost word for word in a TV series called *Vikings* in 2014, a fictional show based on the Norse myth of Ragnar Lothbrok. Gone unrecognised by most viewers<sup>10</sup>, the inclusion of this poem bridges and compounds different eras of human experience and made the production of this scene profoundly personal for writer Michael Hirst and the actor whose character spoke the lines<sup>11</sup>.

In this chapter - and the next - I draw a connection between Tsumkwe and the film set of *Vikings*, where I conducted additional fieldwork after my experience in Tsumkwe presented me with an ethnographic puzzle in which the two spaces were linked.

I describe here what I call a 'Pre-Archive' – a space which, rather than having developed a coherent narrative of history and identity is torn between different images and interpretations of what it means to be San. In the introduction, I showed how the way we are able to perceive images – in other words what can be seen – is governed by structures

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<sup>10</sup> according to the show's producers

<sup>11</sup> A fact they revealed each individually in separate conversations with me about the scene.

of knowledge. While these structures limit what we can conceive of, they are to some degree in a dialectical relationship with the individual perceiving and producing them. The images I laid out in Chapter Two, *Image Ruins*, embody some of the notions and ideas about San which can be known through research. Chapter Three, *Mise-en-scène*, on the other hand, represented an image of San after having been perceived and reproduced through my own ethnographic experience. I suggest in this chapter that we can think of the structures which govern the conceivability of images as Derridian archives – archives of the mind where knowledge, ideas and notions are organised and assigned or denied authenticity.

However, in order to productively speak about an archive, one has to explore its boundaries. I was presented with the opportunity to do this when some of the Ju|'hoansi in the filmmaking workshop compared Tsumkwe with the fictional TV show *Vikings*. By doing a few weeks of fieldwork on the set of this TV show, I was able to consider 'image archives' in a context removed from my actual field site. I found a surprising number of similarities between the 'archive spaces' within which images of the San and images of Vikings operate respectively. This enabled me to formulate a framework which is not bound by San particularities (and thereby contributing to a process of exotification or romanticisation) but is instead guided by the interplay between images and idealised identities.

I found, however, that while the archive is a useful notion to work with structures of knowledge generally, the nature of images and the flexibility and fluidity with which they are produced and perceived created a situation where the archive was not governed by a hegemonic truth. Despite all the mystical and magical appeal of images of San-ness, Tsumkwe never entirely agrees on a singular image. Whatever image is presented is also simultaneously challenged, giving rise to new images. By gaining its legitimacy from performative, imaged based, and other 'non-written' records, the *Pre-Archive* allows for a multiplicity of truths.

This 'pre-archival' space is in a circular relationship with how it is inhabited and produced, an issue I explore further in the following chapter. This chapter and the next are therefore intimately intertwined and only work in conversation with one another. The Pre-Archive is maintained and inhabited by the Trickster and the Trickster is born from the Pre-Archive.

The chapter opens with the ethnographic puzzle which acts as a framework throughout this and the next chapter. At an editing workshop, where we watched several episodes of *Vikings* in the evening, the Ju|'hoansi workshop participants argued, after I tried to explain the production of *Vikings*, that the show was 'real' because it was the same as their lives. The remainder of the chapter keeps returning to the question of how a comparison between Vikings and Tsumkwe can be useful.

Taking the word 'real' as my departure point, I begin by looking at the context in which people in Tsumkwe usually ask whether something is real. I find that tourists, NGO workers, researchers and other visitors bring with them preconceived ideas of who the 'real' San are and use markers of realness for value judgements.

I refer to the objects which are judged in this way and by these (varying) markers of realness as cultural products. This is the first way in which parallels can be drawn between the film set of Vikings and Tsumkwe. Where the set produces episodes for a TV show, Tsumkwe produces a space in which San identity can be easily commodified.

I briefly discuss different scholarly approaches to cultural commodification and authenticity, concluding that it is necessary to understand people's relationship to their commodified culture as extremely complex, rather than thinking along strict divides of 'traditional' and 'modern' or commodification and exploitation.

The next section discovers that what draws outsiders as consumers and audiences to the products which the film set and Tsumkwe produce is a search for origin. Both the Vikings and ancient Hunter-Gatherers are at once shrouded in mystery and seem to hint at the beginning of history.

In this vein, for the remainder of the chapter, I consider the ethnographic material with the help of Derrida's notion of the archive. After briefly discussing how the notion of the archive might map onto what I have discussed so far, I consider how the context of prehistory (rather than history) complicates the notion. Because of a relative lack of tangible evidence, and the predominance of intangible evidence, such as performance or visuals, this kind of archive lends itself particularly well to conjecture and self-projection. As a result, the Pre-Archive, in contrast to the hegemony enforcing archive proper, is characterised by a multitude of truths which are pitched between the era of myth and recorded history.

### “THE SAME AS US”

The ethnographic account I am about to present is an abridged version of a conversation that took place over the space of 45 minutes. Maybe somewhat naively, I expected the experience of showing the San a main-stream TV-series set in medieval Scandinavia made for a Western audience to be akin to what Laura Bohannon (1966) describes in her classic *Shakespeare in the Bush*: Me scrambling for the right words to explain a narrative which, on the surface, only makes sense to a Western audience while losing faith in the notion that anything could ever be universally understood and finally being told to go back home and check with the wiser people in my society as to what the story actually means. This turned out to be only partially true.

The screening took place after an editing workshop which, due to technical difficulties, had to be held in Grootfontein where we were kindly offered the facilities of a kindergarten a friend of mine runs. In the evening, we decided to pass the time by watching one of the films I had brought with me and *Vikings* was chosen purely because my dog was named after one of the characters in the show. As we were sitting in our makeshift cinema, with a story about Vikings fighting, pillaging and going home for dinner afterwards flickering across the whiteboard of the kindergarten classroom, the San had no difficulties whatsoever following the storyline. To the contrary, they told me they loved it. They laughed at the same bits I laughed at, and when they asked question for clarification it was clear that they were attributing importance to the same things I did when I watched it for the first time. Elizabeth and Joel even picked up on the unusually empowered female character the show is known for.

However, things turned more complicated:

“Is this real?” One of my friends asks.

“No”, I say – maybe too quickly. I watch them silently as they watch a snowstorm being projected at the wall.

“I guess”, I say as I pass Komtsa a cigarette and light one for myself “It’s real in the sense that it kind of looks like this in that country”.

I realise that obviously I am not explaining myself very well.

*Of course they are making it look very beautiful. Like, if you took a picture of the flamingos flying over Nyae Nyae Pan while the sun was rising. You know what I mean?*

“Yes...”, says Elizabeth

*...When something is very beautiful, that is how it really is. So this is what you have to show, otherwise when the people look at it they will not know how it really is.*

“Hmm....” I turn on my audio recorder and grab a pen to note Elizabeth’s words down on the back of an exercise sheet I prepared for the editing class. I am still writing as Kao raises another question.

*The people in that country, do they look like this?*

“Not anymore. They just dress like all people in Europe now. You know, Albrecht is actually from this country. But some hundred years ago, people dressed like this. Or at least this is what we think they dressed as. It’s not always easy to say.”

*But today, they dress different? Nobody uses the axes anymore as well?*

“No. I mean, there are museums where you can look at these things. And sometimes people get together and dress like this for fun or for tourists. But this film, it’s for entertainment”

*People like to remember this?*

“Well, it’s really not clear how accurate this is. But some people in Europe are very proud that they are descendants of the Vikings. I’m not sure if it’s really remembering.... Maybe it’s more like people like playing with the idea....”

“Hm...” - The general sound of agreement which the Ju|’hoansi use very frequently.

*Did this story happen?*

“No. Not actually, but it is based on a very old story that probably the Vikings back then thought was true.”

Finally reaching a feeling that reminds me of Shakespeare in the Bush, I start elaborating. I feel like I am not explaining myself very well and counterproductively try to compensate by going into detail about Scandinavian history, the saga of Ragnar Lothbrok and how the original saga differs from this film.

Fortunately, my counterproductive rambling is interrupted by Komtsa.

*You know, you said this isn't real. But from what you have said about it, I think it's the same as us, so it's real.*

## The real people

The departure point in my attempt to disentangle this ethnographic puzzle will be the word ‘real’. I am at this point not interested in any theoretical exploration of the nature of reality. ‘Real’ for the purpose of this chapter is not an analytic category that I use to describe something qualitatively. Rather, I want to see what the notion of ‘real’ does in the following ethnographic contexts. How are people in Tsumkwe and at the film set relating to what they believe to be real?

Throughout this chapter, the term ‘real’ will merge with ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’. This is not to suggest that the three denote identical ideas, but I hope that it will be clear in the context how the three are, by some, used interchangeably.

In a conversation after the above ethnographic example I tried to ascertain what exactly Komtsa meant by ‘real’ and whether clarifying translations of the word might aid my understanding. I was told that ‘real’ simply meant ‘just how things are’. Finally, I asked whether what they were referring to could be translated as |’hoan, the Ju|’hoan word for true, correct or real. The term forms part of the word Ju|’hoansi which means ‘the true/real people’. However, the responses to this question were divided. While three of the group readily agreed, two felt ‘real’ was different from |’hoan but could not quite place their finger on it, and yet another person argued that |’hoan referred to doing things the right way (making Ju|’hoansi the People who do things the right way, rather than the true people).

Unsurprisingly, the concept of what exactly constitutes ‘real’ was not coherent among people in Tsumkwe – just as any other groups’ articulated understanding of ‘real’ would most likely be incoherent, too. This disagreement at the workshop, however, did foreshadow an argument I seek to make about the existence of multiple truths in Tsumkwe.

The question of whether something is real in Nyae Nyae is normally asked to qualify San-ness. Most prominently and openly the question is posed by tourists:

*‘Are these real San?’*

*‘Is this a real bow and arrow?’*

*‘Do they live like real hunter-gatherers?’*

*‘Is this a real Bushman hut?’*

*‘Are their clothes real?’*

When hosting guided walks, George would often be asked by the tourists where he learned “the Bushman language”. I observed this several times when accompanying him on those walks (in fact, sometimes the tourists chose to ask me, rather than him where he had learned the “Bushman language”). However, George also sometimes spoke about it because it bothered him. To the tourists’ mind, George’s fluent English and, as he explains to me with some resentment, his protruding belly mark him out as just another Namibian. George’s reply in these situations is of course that he was born in Tsumkwe, that he is a San and that as such, Ju|’hoan is his mother tongue.

What he does not tell them is that, like most other San, he also speaks other San languages. Most San speak at least four languages: their own mother-tongue, English which they learn at school, Afrikaans, which acts as an intergenerational and interethnic lingua franca, and normally at least one other San language of bordering or related San groups. What he also does not tell them is that he is the son of chief Bobo, grandson of ≠Toma, the central subject of John Marshall’s documentaries.

As I discuss this with him, Eliza interjects:



*You should tell the tourists that you are not just any Bushman but actually almost a prince.*

George raises his eyebrows in confusion, like he sometimes does when Eliza's lack of knowledge of San culture, despite her being half San, becomes apparent. Then he shakes his head.

*The chief is not really a Bushman thing. We don't have chiefs. It would be too complicated to explain this to every tourist. All they want to know is if I am real.*

To the tourists, George believes, it does not matter who exactly George is. What does matter is whether he is a real Bushman.

#### AUTHENTIC DANCES

Before I continue my argument, I need to take a moment to ethnographically contextualise a subject which is important throughout this thesis – namely, the dances which are performed by San in Nyae Nyae. There are, however, several problems in describing these dances.

Like the traditional hunt, which I will discuss in the next chapter, traditional dances are difficult to capture on film. While there are countless videos on YouTube showing these dances, there are several obstacles. A traditional dance, done for the purpose of healing, happens at night and lasts several hours. The chanting, meant to help induce a trance-like state in the healers is somewhat monotonous and the dance movements are subtle and contained.

“A dance is meant to be experienced, not filmed”, says Gary, an archaeologist from Johannesburg who has dedicated several years of his life to learning the trance dance. “It's tricky”, a filmmaker from Cape Town explains in response:

*You can do it at dusk, but you have to ask them to make the fire quite big and then you have to work a lot with close ups and fancy shots and do a lot in the editing suite if you want it to feel like a dance. But if you just want to show it, like for information, you can just have a long shot.*

A Youtube search of “Bushman Dance” provides videos which range from amateur tourist recordings to professional productions. Without wanting to go too deeply into an analysis of these videos, there are some clear trends as to how dances are captured. More often than not, they are shown during the day, around a large (for Ju|’hoansi standards) fire and the overwhelming majority of them shows the performers in traditional leather dress. What is deemed interesting or beautiful for an international audience is emphasized.

However, while this may give the impression of a homogenous practice, how dances are actually performed in Nyae Nyae varies widely. A dance can happen for any number and combinations of reasons. For the performances for tourists at Tsumkwe lodge, for instance, a group of dancers is brought to the premises in a white van by Jackie, a professional musician from Cape Town who is trying to teach San children musical instruments and funds his endeavours through organising the traditional dance performances. The people he brings to the lodge are often not from Tsumkwe, or even Nyae Nyae, but from a place near Nhoma and many of them identify as !Kung Rather than Ju|’hoansi.

*I’d love to bring people from Tsumkwe. But these people here, they are always drunk. If I pay them, then the next day they won’t be able to dance or I won’t find them. The people from Kapteinspost, they are always there and they are better dancers. They know how to shake. (Jackie)*

The performances happen at night. A bonfire is lit, in front of which the tourists sit in chairs in a semi-circle. Then, the dancers shuffle in, often shivering in their leather dress since the main tourist season is during the Nambian winter. The women stand in a line, singing and clapping while the men dance in front of them. Jackie explains the dances to the audience and plays a jazzy interlude on his trumpet, supported by a guitar player. He does this, he explains to me, in order to break up the monotony of the dances.

*To Europeans, they all sound the same. That’s why we invented that song about Tsumkwe and also include the Melon tossing game. Which isn’t technically a dance, but it looks like one.*

In the end, the tourists join the dancing, Jackie makes an appeal for his charity, and then he drives the dancers home.

This dance, for tourists, is different in almost every possible way from a dance performed for the purpose of healing, even though they involve the same songs and similar dance movements. A healing dance would happen at night as well, but around a small fire, just big enough to provide a little bit of heat for the women who are sitting around it in a circle, chanting and clapping for hours. For hours also, the men would dance in small steps around the fire until enough energy has been created to commence the healing. Proceeding in the circular movement, the healer would begin to embrace the people in the circle, putting one hand on their chest and one on the back, in order to draw out disease and malicious spirits.

However, dances for other purposes or in other contexts might happen during the day, with or without leather clothes, with or without a fire, with or without an audience. Each dance performance is unique to its context and purpose.

“Authenticity” as Stronza writes, “is a subjective concept” (2001, p. 271). Subjective authenticity - claims about who or what the ‘real’ San are - is mostly discussed in reference to tourists. However, it is important to remember that authenticity is equally subjective for other people coming to Tsumkwe, such as researchers or NGO workers.

“It’s amazing that they have managed to hold on to their culture like this,” one tourist reflects after a day of guided bush walks, cultural performances and Ju|’hoan dances around the camp fire:

*I expected to come here and see not very much. But they are alive and well. And they really are still living it properly. Sure, if you drive around in the town you will see people in jeans, but as we saw at the dance, they still have their traditional clothes, and clearly they value them. I saw some dances down in the south and they were not half as good as this. No real commitment, no joy in their ancient culture. But these people are happy to share their traditions. And their survival skills... they are still real. You could take any of these people and drop them in the middle of the bush and they would be fine.*

“And how does that make you feel?” I ask.

*Very... happy. You now, we in the modern world are so engrossed in our smartphones and the internet and all that. It's nice that here they still have that real connection to the land.*

For this tourist, the parameters for being a real San heavily echoed romanticised notions of the Noble Savage. He speaks about pride in their culture, their survival skills and their connection to nature. Another tourist, from the same group, however, judged the same outing very differently:

*I mean, are they even real Bushmen? I saw empty bags of maize meal everywhere and boxes of soy mince. I mean the dances were very nice and it's good that tradition is being preserved like this but this is not sustainable. If you ask me they have just been put here and are waiting to go extinct.*

The 'tourist dances' were in fact a somewhat contentious point among the more established visitors. While for tourists who only stayed for a couple of days, the dances were in the first case a marker of authenticity and in the second at least a somewhat mitigating factor, visiting researchers and independent travellers often felt somewhat offended by the dances which were put on for tourists.

Tom Smith<sup>12</sup>, for example, a San scholar active in various indigenous rights movements, would actively stay away from the dances during a trip to Tsumkwe.

"I'll tell you what" he said to his research assistant on his last evening after scoffing at the dance being performed for tourists at the other end of the lodge.

*Tomorrow we load up the car with shed loads of tobacco and drive to G'oo. They'll show us a real dance – none of this dress up.*

A similar dislike for dances which are performed for tourists was evident in Gary. After having spent many years living with San in Botswana and learning the trance dance, he wanted to celebrate the end of his stay with what he called "a proper dance". When I asked what he meant by this, his first clarification was "not like the ones for tourists" but rather a dance with experienced dancers which would "really create some cosmic energy".

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<sup>12</sup> anonymised

The ideas outsiders brought with them were largely resistant to change. Where these ideas came from varied widely. While researchers and some NGO workers tended to refer to scholarly work as their influence, other NGO workers and tourists had gathered their information from a range of public works about the San, including, most prominently, the books of Laurens Van der Post and *The Gods must be crazy* (1980), but also countless documentaries and popular travel magazines. Some tourists cited popular knowledge, or information they had received from Namibians previously on their journey.

What was even more interesting, were people's answers when I asked them whether their ideas (which varied widely) had been confirmed or proven wrong by their stay. The vast majority reported that what they had experienced in Tsumkwe confirmed their beliefs. The exception to this trend were travellers who reported that they were surprised by how "real" the Ju|'hoansi turned out to be, despite their expectations to the contrary.

The above are just four examples to set the ethnographic scene. While it might be possible to generalise among certain groups, views on what makes a real San varied from person to person. Markers of real San-ness varied also. For the first tourist, it was an inferred pride in culture, for the second tourist a lack of hunter-gatherer subsistence, for Tom it was the absence of traditional dress worn for tourists, and for Gary it was the skill involved in the dance. However, what all these views, like all the other descriptions of San-ness I have heard, share, is that value judgements happen based on them. This is a point I wish to stress before embarking on the rest of this chapter: Ideas about what constitutes a real/proper/true/"hoan San vary but they matter because they build the basis of value judgements, according to which decisions are made, money is spent, and projects are launched.

## CULTURAL PRODUCTS AND THEIR VALUE

What is it that is judged, and why does the judgement matter to the San? This question leads us to the first meaningful comparison between the film set of *Vikings* and Tsumkwe. Both places, I argue are sites of explicit cultural production. What I mean by this is that both places produce something to be consumed by an international audience. These products relate to, tie in with, and consist of particular images of and ideas about culture – San culture and Viking culture respectively in these cases. The reason these products are desirable is precisely because of their association with culture. Without the attached

ideas and images about culture, the products are nothing. To clarify, there is room to consider cultural products with more nuance. We might, for instance, want to recall Bourdieu's exploration of the field of cultural production (1993). Bourdieu considers cultural production to contribute, symbolically or materially to the maintenance of the 'universe of belief' which in turn gives structure to the field of cultural production. But the sense in which I want to think about cultural products here is rather straightforward and can easily be framed with the theories of images I outlined in my introduction. What is produced in Tsumkwe creates expectations and those expectations shape the judgement of cultural products in return. In this way, cultural products are to expectations as bodies are to images, reproducing and reconfiguring them at the same time. Both places contribute to the shaping of cultural identity and at the same time depend on those cultural identities to give meaning to their products.

Because this is a circular process we could start our exploration of it at any point. Here, I want to begin by looking at the products. In the case of the Vikings film set, which I will use throughout this and the next chapter to illustrate my argument, the product is easily identified. Michael Hirst and his team of writers, directors, assistant directors, actors, extras, set designers, costume designers, makeup and various other creatives create episodes of a TV show which is aired by the History network. "Without the Vikings culture..." a producer who was involved in the show's launch explains

*...this would just be another family drama. Add Viking's to it and it immediately sells. There's something very appealing about all the sailing and pillaging.*

This sentiment was echoed by several people on the executive team. *Viking's* unique selling point are the ideas we have about Vikings and the powerful images associated with them.

What is being produced in Tsumkwe, on the other hand, is not quite as obvious. One evening I was camping out in the bush with Joel, George and Eliza on our way to a remote village. As I looked at the crisp outline of the milky way drawing an arch across the savannah, I remarked on how beautiful it was. Joel agreed:

*Yes, I think it is the most beautiful place in the world.*

This was not an idle line. Joel frequently spoke of his love for the Kalahari, spending as much time as he could in his home village Nhoma where he was free to enjoy all the beauty nature had to offer.

“Yes, that’s why the people are coming here from all over the world” George replied with a hint of a sarcastic chuckle. Joel stayed serious. “No” he said, absentmindedly poking the fire with a stick

*People come from all over the world because there is San here.*

“Really?” Eliza interjected. George took a deep breath in. “Tell me one White person who is not here because of the San.” He started counting on his hand “Gary is busy with his experimental Archaeology. Tom is doing studies on sleeping. Dave with the schooling. Arno. All the tourists...”

“Andre is not here because of the San”. Eliza interrupted.

“Ah” George replied in the tone of someone happy to be about to prove themselves right.

*Andre is here to look after the power plant. And the power plant is here to support Tsumkwe because of the Nyae Nyae foundation. See, it all comes down to the San. Not you and me [pointing at Eliza] but the San.*

The conversation between George, Joel and Eliza reflected what I had observed throughout my time in Tsumkwe. Everybody I spoke to who did not identify as San, was in Tsumkwe because of the San. In a similar way as the film set exists to facilitate the production of episodes of Vikings, there seemed to be a sphere in Tsumkwe, which existed for the sake of San identity and cultural production.

The first product that comes to mind as being produced in Tsumkwe around San identity are tourist performances. as mentioned in the previous chapter, almost every village offers dance performances, bushwalks and demonstrations of traditional skills to tourists. The level of gentrification, professionalism and advertisement strategy varies. Some villages receive the support of museum organisations in providing activities for tourists, and have links to tour companies, others just improvise signs by the road. Lately, it has been three villages close to Tsumkwe which have received the lion share of tourism business. In the “old days of Arno and John” [Marshall], a man from |aotcha claims, even

the remote villages would get tourists. Arno and John, according to this informant, would act as interlocutors and make sure that each village got their fair share of tourists.

There are, of course, also physical products being produced in Tsumkwe. Bracelets and jewellery are sold in the villages to tourists, at the shop in Tsumkwe, and sent to Windhoek to be sold in tourist shops there. However, I would argue that the most important ‘product’ produced in Tsumkwe is San identity and San images. Tsumkwe provides a place where not only tourists can go but also where film crews can shoot films about the San or about hunter-gathers in general. It provides a place where researchers go to do experimental archaeology and genetic studies.

This is where the argument becomes circular again. Tsumkwe produces San images but it is the importance of San identity existing in the imagination of tourists, researchers, and NGOs that makes them matter.

If we continue along the line of considering the film set and Tsumkwe as places that produce something, we have to think about how value is attributed to these products. *Vikings* shapes our idea of Viking identity. Tsumkwe shapes our idea of San identity. However, it is based on existing ideas about cultural identity that these products are judged.

“We constantly have clever people in forums on our back” Tom, head of makeup at *Vikings*, explains.

*A show like Vikings lives or dies by whether the world thinks it looks real or not. We have historians advising us all the time and we really try our best to be as close to what we know as possible.*

Tsumkwe, on the other hand, lives or dies by whether tourists, filmmakers and researchers (the region’s main sources of money) consider what they see to be ‘real’ San culture. As one tourism professional points out, “The reason Tsumkwe gets tourists is because we can still say that San culture is real here.” As discussed in Chapter One, Anthropologists have played a big part in defining Tsumkwe as a place with ‘real’ San.

The fact that these products are judged by how well they align with preconceived notions of cultural identity often means that they are made to *look* real, above all else. One signature aesthetic of *Vikings*, for example, is that hands in shot always are either bloody



or dirty. “Back in the days, people didn’t have manicures and they did not have soap” one of the makeup creatives explains while she carefully dusts dirt over an extra’s hand.

In Tsumkwe, an example for this are, again, the tourist dances. The women in these performances wear leather tops. Traditionally, San women did not cover their chest. However, the fact that the leather tops lined with Ostrich shell beads look like they fit into a San aesthetic, satisfies the tourists.

What is important to remember in the context of Tsumkwe is that there are no coherent unilateral markers for ‘real’ San-ness. Rather, how exactly a product is made to ‘look real’ depends on the audience. For the tourists travelling by tour bus, who value traditional-*looking* aesthetics (but ostensibly not traditional in origin), leather bras are markers of authenticity. For other tourists, or researchers like Tom, traditional dress is a marker of fake performances, or “dress up”. For this kind of audience, ‘real’ San are visually marked by the absence of traditional dress.

#### AUTHENTICITY AND COMMODIFICATION

What we have established so far, is that Tsumkwe and the film set are places of cultural production with products that are judged by pre-existing ideas about culture. There is a rich literature on the relationship between providers and consumers of cultural tourism. As Stronza writes (2001, p. 271), tourists often define for themselves what is authentic, relying on stereotypes. The locals, who are aware of the tourists’ ideas and stereotypes then produce the cultural product the tourist expects, a process referred to by MacCannell as ‘reconstructing ethnicity’ (MacCannell, 1992, p. 159). Urry (1990), on the other hand, coined the powerful notion of the transformative ‘tourist gaze’. He argues that the expectations of the tourists transform local culture.

Stronza (2001) identifies two ways in which anthropologists normally assess the tourist gaze. One view is, that cultural commodification might cause people to forget their past, “lose their culture”, or erode people’s self esteem; the other side of the argument is that engaging in performing cultural activities might help people to “maintain” their identity (2001, p. 273). Anthropologists have used both perspectives in writing about the San.

Sylvain (2002) describes a San tourism project in South Africa where the !Xun ended up feeling misrepresented on top of not actually receiving the money they should have:

The public face of bushman identity (as people who still hunt wild animals with poison arrows) and the public face of corporate development ventures (as empowering the San to regain their dignity and pride) are clearly at odds with the personal realities of Bushmen who have ‘nothing to say’ (2002: 1081)

Huncke and Koot (2012), on the other hand, describe a San tourist village where the local guide takes care to draw a distinction between the performances and the local people’s contemporary life. The example at *Treesleeper* demonstrates that the relationship between the locals, the tourists and their ideas is a delicate one which the San are very much aware of.

While both these examples offer valuable insight into San/tourist relationships, both fall victim to a dualistic traditional/modern divide in the way they frame issues of authenticity. As my examples above show, authenticity in Tsumkwe is not merely a case of evoking the traditional but rather, in various ways, of showing tourists, researchers, and other visitors what the Ju|’hoansi have learned they want to see (as in the case of some audiences preferring the absence of traditional dress).

Bunten, with her work on tourist guides in Maori and native Alaskan cultural tourism provides us with a more nuanced approach. Her analysis looks at “self commodification” as a “highly self-conscious and discursive practice” (Bunten, 2010, p. 51). Rather than considering the tourist gaze an all-powerful transformative element, she pays attention to the hosts’ imagination of the tourist’s gaze. It is along those lines that I want to continue my argument. While the tourists bring with them certain expectations, the San respond to those in reflexive, self-conscious ways.

I already mentioned dress for dances as an example of the variety of tourists’ expectations. Another poignant example can be found in a man and woman who crafted cultural objects to sell to tourists who visited their village. This was one of the villages which received help from a ‘living museum’ organisation and had a relatively steady flow of tourists during the season. I asked them what they did when tourists asked for “real Bushman jewellery”

*Sometimes I give them these [pointing at ostrich shell jewellery] because that is what we wore in the old days. But sometimes they want these [pointing at jewellery made of colourful plastic beads] because those are the ones we wear today. (Nai)*

“Can you tell the difference who wants what?” I ask.

*Yes, after a while you learn to tell the difference. [laughs] your kind, you want the colourful ones.*

At this point her husband interjects.

*Sometimes they want something that has been used. So I make two kinds of knives. I make very beautiful, new knives and I make some that look a little bit older, like they have been used.*

## Search for origin

It is myself in fact that I think I recognize, myself and the marvellous world linked to the power to dream, a power common to myself and the earliest man. (Bataille, 2009, p. 82)

If outsider's ideas of what is and is not real play an important part, it is important to more closely look at what exactly it is that motivates them to come to Tsumkwe. I argue in this section, that it is the audience's or consumer's own origin which they are looking for and which draws them to both Tsumkwe and Vikings. I want to start this section with an observation which might for now seem out of place here but which I believe is relevant to the points that are to follow.

A quality which is shared by *Vikings* and Tsumkwe is that the places which facilitate the cultural production carry a mystical appeal. Both in Tsumkwe (and surrounding Nyae Nyae) and on the filmset I frequently observed people remarking on how the places were “special”, “magical”, “awe-inspiring” - cut off from the ‘normal’ world. Here are a few examples for illustration:

<p><i>Of course, the pay is pretty piss poor. But I do it because it is a place like no other. There is a buzz in the air (Anon. male extra at Vikings)</i></p>	<p><i>Some evenings when I sit by myself and smoke a cigarette I am overcome by this intense sense of profoundness of the place. (NGO worker in Tsumkwe)</i></p>
<p><i>It's always the same. One moment everything is happening at once and the next moment you spend two hours waiting next to a fog machine in a dank forest and nothing moves. The flow of energy and time is all messed up in this crazy magical way. It can be really painful but also the most amazing feeling you can imagine (Mel, on set post production on Vikings)</i></p>	<p><i>Time works differently in Tsumkwe. It stops, then it speeds up but then suddenly everything is the same way as before. It's... irrational. It's pretty tiring actually (translated from German, Matthias, NGO worker)</i></p>
<p><i>When you step on the set, it looks great. There is so much attention to detail, everything comes together. But if you go to the camera and just look at it through the frame... suddenly it's magical. (Michael Hirst, creator of Vikings)</i></p>	<p><i>Three years is nothing in Tsumkwe. Things can happen very fast but they take a long, long time to settle (translated from Afrikaans, Joel)</i></p>
	<p><i>A dance must be at night. The fire transforms the dancers. When you have the right fire going, everything comes together: the people, the dance, the spirits and the place. (Gary, Tsumkwe)</i></p>

This vague sense of mystique which both places seem to evoke is difficult to quantify, but a point which I believe is important to be aware of in taking my argument further.

A more ostensible kind of myth can be found in the reason why people – that is tourists, travellers, researchers, NGO-workers, TV audiences, creatives – are attracted to the products these two places produce. We established above that tourists come with preconceived expectations. In this section I explore the reason they are interested in the San in the first place.

Both the San as idealised hunter-gatherers and Vikings evoke powerful notions of a human past which is beyond our reach but alluded to in myths. The story of Ragnar Lothbrok (the subject of *Vikings*) is the legend of a Scandinavian king which suggests a united origin of all Scandinavian countries. According to the legend, Ragnar united the existing Viking groups and his sons were the first kings of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. His alleged sons are considered historical fact<sup>13</sup>. Ragnar and his being their father, however, are part of Norse mythology. The fact that Vikings occupy this somewhat ambiguous space in history is something the producers of the show are keenly aware of and happy to exploit:

*It's easy for people to think themselves into this world. Many people in our audience, which as we know is predominantly white, have Viking ancestors. Heck, they went all over the world. We probably all have a little bit of Viking in us. And we bring them back to life. We bring a part of our past back to life. (US based producer)*

The San have an arguably even more powerful link to our imagined origin. For a long time, they were explicitly thought to be the missing link between earlier hominoids and homo sapiens. Gordon writes about the mission of the 1925 Denver expedition which set out to find 'wild' Bushmen in Namibia:

Sixteen businessmen were persuaded [...] that their sponsorship would bring honor and renown to the city of Denver by, as the Denver Post (July 1925) put it, finding the true missing link between the highest anthropoid ape [ape?] and the highest type of manhood. (Gordon, Picturing Bushmen, 16)

As elaborated on in Chapter Two, the San were considered little more than fauna in the 19th and early 20th century by Black and White non-San alike. However, while they have gained in prestige, their association with the earliest forms of human life remains. In documentaries, such as BBC documentary *The Incredible Human Journey – Out of Africa* (2009), they are used as stand-ins for Stone Age hunter-gatherers. Contemporary

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<sup>13</sup> according to *Vikings* on-set historian

scholars, too still draw links between contemporary hunter-gatherers<sup>14</sup> and Stone Age humans:

African hunter-gatherer communities, which have been studied by ethnographers for a century, are now quite well understood. Some generalizations can be made about the foraging way of life, at least as it persists in the twentieth century. Perhaps this understanding can be drawn on to reconstruct the ways of the early human foragers, who lived for millions of years in the African plains before the evolution of modern humans. (Kuper, 1994, p. 55)

HJ and Janette Deacon, two archaeologists from South Africa, dedicate their book *Human Beginnings in South Africa: uncovering the secrets of the Stone Age*, in which they often speak of San to a 19th century San man from Lesotho named Qing:

We would like to dedicate this book to Qing and the |Xam San, as they shared knowledge of a period of South African history and of a heritage that for too long has been a secret which has not been spoken of. The period occurred before formal histories were written and the heritage is all that remains of human endeavours from those times. (Deacon & Deacon, 1999)

While contemporary ways of linking the San with our shared human origin are mostly carefully considered and explored with nuance, the way in which tourists process these notions in daily interactions in Tsumkwe simplifies matters. “It’s crazy to imagine that we all lived like this once”, “It’s a window into the past” and “You can really see where man comes from here” are just a few examples of utterances one could frequently hear around tourists.

## SPIRITUALITY

The fascination with where we come from is powerfully explored in Werner Herzog’s film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* where he speaks to scientists working in the *Chauvet Cave* to find out as much as they can about human life in Europe 32 Thousand years ago. Werner

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<sup>14</sup> On page 73 it is made clear that Kuper does indeed refer to the San. It should be noted, however, that he does point to the variety of contemporary San groups, citing Barnard and Silberbauer.

Herzog calls the oldest known cave painting which the scientists – and the film – study “one of the greatest discoveries in the history of human culture” (2:30).

However, it is not merely scientific interest that drives the attraction to all things that let us glimpse flashes of a shared human past. There is also often a distinct spiritual, otherworldly element to the fascination. Werner Herzog’s film picks up on explicitly spiritual themes towards the end of the film. More subtly however, his intention to frame the search for human origin becomes apparent in his choice of music when he initially reveals the paintings to the viewer. He chooses distinctly spiritual sounding music which seems like it would best be played in a cathedral, subtly linking the cave with a place of worship.

A prominent theme in *Vikings*, as in the Norse legend on which the show is based, is the transition from Paganism to Christianity. According to Scandinavian mythology, it was Ragnar Lothbrok who brought Christianity to Scandinavia. Ragnar’s era thus signals the transition from prehistory into history (remember that his legend attributed sons are all actual Scandinavian kings), as well as from Paganism into Christianity.

This is also reflected in the notion of the missing link, the question of what let us transition from animal into human. Covertly, the theme of spiritual transition can be observed among travellers reflecting on Tsumkwe. Many tourists, especially those travelling by themselves, compared Nyae Nyae in some way to their ideas of Eden:

*It looks just like any other grey, bushy place. The landscape is monotonous to an almost ridiculous extreme. And yet, sitting here, watching the sunset I feel at home like nowhere else. I don’t know what it is but this is what paradise must have felt like. (anon. traveller)*

The reference to paradise or the Garden Eden is not only one that expresses spirituality. It refers again to an imagined moment at which we transition from a pre-human to a human stage.

Another argument in support of this connection between the San, origin and spirituality in the public imagination is the way in which the San, and with them many other indigenous people, are thought to be living a life that is more closely connected to nature. Additionally, Aleks, the woman who wanted to ‘buy’ Nhoma in the previous

chapter recently published a film which advertises her efforts in Nyae Nyae. The film clearly capitalises on this suggested spiritual connection with “mother nature”.

It would be a mistake to assume that this romantic longing for the past is only restricted to non-San. Rather, many of the Ju|’hoansi I spoke to indicated a longing for the old ways. In the previous chapter I described the effect of watching John Marshall documentaries in Nhoma which inspired young and old to tell stories all night long and play hunting games.

It was, however, chiefly the middle-aged Ju|’hoansi who reported feeling this longing for a supposedly lost way of life. One evening, around the fire in a village north of Tsumkwe, I asked the people whether they would like to live in the past.

“Yes” replied Bao, a woman in her 40s. “Back in the old days we could travel with the game and the men would always bring home good meat”. Several other Ju|’hoansi, both men and women of a similar age agreed and shared their own romanticised vision of what life in the past must have been like, free from the government, always on the move and closely connected to the land.

After a while, the conversation was interrupted by Komtsa, the old man of the village, who, as we tried to calculate once based on his personal memories must have been over 90 years old. “In the old days, we sometimes killed other people [San] just for a blanket or some wire!”<sup>15</sup> He said this with a slight, cynical laugh, waving off the remarks of the others as romantic nonsense. His sister agreed. “The food now is bad but it is there always. I lost five children because I could not feed them”.

This may indicate that for the San, too, the longing for origin is not necessarily rooted in real experiences, but similarly to that of the outsiders based on an imagined past instead.

What we have established in this chapter so far is a situation where cultural products in Tsumkwe are subject to an evaluation based on ‘realness’. At the same time, the reason that others are drawn to these products in the first place is their association with our shared human past.

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<sup>15</sup> This was a rare kind of statement. Ju|’hoansi rarely contradicted the notion of the ever peaceful egalitarians. Komtsa saying this was based partly on how late in the evening it was, the extensive amount of time I had spent in the village and the familiar links I had to him.



There is an important tension in this relationship. On the one hand, the cultural products depend on a mysterious appeal that is vague enough for people to easily project themselves into the imagined past. On the other hand, the constant need for validation and ‘realness’ requires reference points for what is and is not part of the past. In other words, what is alluring about prehistoric cultural identities is that they are outside of history, part of which is a lack of proof - proof which they paradoxically need to establish that they are part of prehistory. I will develop this argument further in the remainder of this chapter. To do this, it is helpful to turn our attention to the notion of archives – structures which bring order to the collective imagination of history – and the problems they face when being confronted with prehistory.

## Archives

Throughout this chapter, we have seen a reoccurring need for realness, authentication and validation. It is, however, a very specific kind of authenticity that is asked for here. As established in the last section, due to their appeal being tied to notions of human origin, the cultural products in this context need evidence that is situated in history – or rather the moment just before history; that moment in time, metaphorically speaking, when the human spark is thought to be ignited.

To help think about this link I want to introduce what Derrida explicitly calls the notion (rather than the concept) of the archive. The archive has been the subject of much anthropological and philosophical interest. In line with what I already argued in Chapter One about archives as structures of knowledge, I am interested here primarily in the archive as something abstract, as a collection and arrangement of evidence and knowledge which define what is or is not authentic. In Foucault’s words: “The archive... is that which defines at the outset the system of enunciability.” (1969, p. 146)

This is not to say that there are no physical archives of San and Viking culture. There has been, throughout the 19th and 20th century, a rhetoric of actively preserving our knowledge of the San for fear of their culture being on the brink of extinction. It was for this reason that Bleek and Lloyd collected the stories of their San servants in *Specimens of Bushman folklore* (Bleek, et al., 1911). It was in the same spirit of preservation that the *Allgemeine Zeitung* (the German Namibian Newspaper) “published a strong plea for a

museum” in 1924 to avoid the loss of its “scientific treasures – “Bushman skeletons for instance”” (Gordon, 1997, p. 114). And it is in the same spirit still that tourists take pictures of what they believe to be a people fading into extinction.

However, physical collections of San artefacts aside, the most convincing link between what I have discussed above and the archive comes from Derrida:

It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement (91).

For Derrida, too, the archive is driven by a search for origin. We might therefore want to consider the ‘cultural production’/ ‘production of cultural products’ as happening against the backdrop of an archive – an archive that is concerned with the collection and structuring of knowledge about what Viking and San culture is, shaping conceivable images and markers of authenticity in the process. The kinds of people who are building this archive and are interested in it are all the people who have been talked about in this chapter so far: the consumers of cultural products who depend on markers of authenticity to judge value on the one hand, and the performers, producers, creatives and creators of the cultural product on the other hand.

Both for Derrida and Foucault, despite their differing opinions on the archive, according to Zeitlyn (2012) “there is no escape from archival hegemony” (p. 463). This point is important here and one I will deal with throughout this section. I argue, to some degree here and more in depth in Chapter Five and Six, that even if we do think of the body of knowledge and ideas about San as an archive it is one which lacks hegemony and people do find ways to leave it.

Paradoxically, however hegemon, Derrida leaves room for the archive to change:

[the archive] is at once institutive and conservative. Revolutionary and traditional. (1998, p. 7)

In his foreword (p.33-81) Derrida uses the example of Yerushalmi who aims to actively transform the archive Derrida is concerned with by arguing that Psychoanalysis is a Jewish science and that this will become accepted knowledge in the future. While this raises interesting questions about the relationship between the archive and the future, it

also shows us that the archive, in a perpetual state of incompleteness, is continuously subject to change.

This quality of the archive makes sense for both the idea of Vikings and San. Throughout the 20th century we can see the San shift from “Earthmen [who] have no recognized language, beyond the simple and almost unintelligible patois which designates their simple wants... [and] no knowledge of the Supreme Being” in 1925 (Gordon, 1997, p. 27) to the “original affluent society” as coined by Marshall Sahlins in 1972.

The popular belief of Vikings wearing horned helmets, for instance, was actually inspired by costumes created for the 1876 production of Wagner’s *Ring der Nibelungen* (Frank, 2000). While this imagination persisted for a while, it has been challenged by a lack of archaeological evidence. Instead, it is currently agreed that Vikings wore very plain helmets.



*Left: Vikings as depicted in History Channel show ‘Vikings’, Right: a picture from ‘Hey Wickie’ a popular cartoon featuring a Viking group which first aired in 1974. Rather than the horned helmets worn in ‘Hey Wickie’, historians now agree that the Vikings wore functional helmets without elaborate adornments. ‘Vikings’, however, imagines them without helmets entirely*

## PREHISTORY

The archive becomes more problematic as a model for authenticity production in Tsumkwe once we consider the particular qualities of the time periods which ideas about both ancient hunter gatherers and Vikings seek to refer to. Both cases, as argued above, are located somewhere between the realm of myths and the beginning of the kind of history we believe to be able to build reliable archives of.

While this distinction of a ‘before’ and ‘after’ is a frequent theme in narratives about origin, Bataille’s thoughts on cave paintings provide us with a comprehensive example of how prehistory is imagined. “The coming of humanity into the world was a drama in two acts”, he writes (2009, p. 144).

According to Bataille, prehistoric cave paintings might tell us something about a moment when man still considered himself equal to animals, a moment before he had become entirely human. Importantly, he argues that living indigenous people “allow us to represent the dawning of humanity in a concrete way” (Bataille, 2009, p. 159). While I personally disagree with this notion, his line of argument illustrates how places like Tsumkwe are closely associated with prehistory – a time ‘before’, when the world and its humans were still fundamentally different.

This distinction between history and prehistory is one that is not only limited to non-San visitors to Tsumkwe, but one that is shared by the Ju|’hoansi also. Ju|’hoan, as a language, has no past tense and no future tense. Rather, to signify a point in time one has to use a reference point. It is possible for this reference to be ‘tomorrow’ or ‘yesterday’. However, beyond those two words I mostly heard reference points like ‘the birth of the old man’, ‘during the war’, ‘during the flooding of the pan’.

Nonetheless, it is still possible to talk about a time before any contextual reference points by referring to “the old people”. This time, which lies between the realm of myths/San cosmology and what can be contextualised is what the Ju|’hoansi refer to when they speak about their traditional way of life.

Thus, to the Ju|’hoansi as well as for the visitor, who has learned about the distinction between history and prehistory, there is a time period which can be put into coherent order and there is a time *before*. In this ‘before-time’, connections suddenly are much more vague and less linear.

According to Cederlund, what we today think of as the Viking period is a new classification and used to be part of what was referred to as the “mythical time” or the “Ancient Nordic time” (2011, p. 21). Nonetheless, *Vikings* is aired on the History channel. This was, as the producer explains, a very conscious choice:

*It’s not a fantasy show. Vikings is so appealing because the Vikings were real. (line producer, Vikings)*

Despite the shows fictional qualities, the appeal of the show is its historic character. Because of this, it was decided that the History Channel would be the best choice for the show. At the same time, the creator, himself a historian from Oxford, is very explicit about it not being a documentary and brushes criticisms regarding historical inaccuracy off as

‘artistic license’. But the pressure to root the show in historic artefacts remains. The creatives at the set are constantly careful to maintain the balance between history and fiction. For instance, there is not a single tattoo on any of the Viking warriors that is made up from scratch. Every pattern is a copy from archaeologically discovered Viking artefacts, as Tom, the head of the makeup department explains.

## TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE

But for those who are operating within and constructing these archives of prehistory, such as the Ju|’hoansi, people in Tsumkwe and artists on the *Vikings* set, the issue is that documents and clearly understood artefacts are extremely rare. Both Ancient San and pre-Christian Vikings, created literal “impressions” (as listed as the first of two understandings of the word by Derrida (1998, p. 26)) – runes in the case of Vikings, cave paintings in the case of Ancient hunter gatherers.

I am not trying argue, that cave paintings constituted an Ancient codified language. What I do want to stretch, however, is that the two things closest to archivable documents Vikings or Ancient San left behind do not offer the same clarity as documents from cultures which left behind written proof of what they were thinking and doing in languages we understand.

To add to this, there are only few physical artefacts that have survived to tell us about prehistoric culture. What is left, is subject to varying interpretations and at the risk of being misinterpreted. Stephen Nash comments rather poignantly on the bias of stone artefacts:

Such differential preservation conveniently informed and reinforced mid-20th-century “Man the Hunter” interpretations of Stone Age cultures: Men hunt, women tend camp, and children are archaeologically invisible. How suburban. How middle-class American. And how wrong. (Nash, 2016)

It is worth taking a moment to reflect explicitly on the qualities of what is often thought of as oral and written culture, both in terms of what this means for the Ju|’hoansi and how this relates to any potential archive of San-ness or San images.

The first thing to note about societies which lack written knowledge transmission, as Biesele (1993, p. 53) points out, is that they function successfully. Not having written

records does not preclude a society from passing on social values and information. Ju|'hoansi make use of a variety of mnemonic devices in order to pass on knowledge.

We can only guess that San rock art partially served as memory aides in the past. However, star constellations are frequently used props in the telling of stories around the fire – no matter whether those stories are traditional or improvised and humorous. Most importantly, story telling itself with its drama and graphic descriptions, serves, according to Bieseke (1993, p. 55) as a tool to help oral transmission of knowledge. Ju|'hoan oral traditions, she argues, rely on visual performative tools as much as the words that are spoken. Particularly important information, for instance, is emphasized through ritualised gestures and facial expressions (Bieseke, 1993, p. 61).

What records exist of oral cultures, are impressions in the second sense of the word explored by Derrida (1998, p. 29): “an insistent impression through the unstable feeling of a shifting figure, of a schema or of an in-finite or indefinite process”. Most of what can be collected from both Vikings and San or Ancient hunter gatherers is visual, oral and performative. Diana Taylor pits two kinds of memory against each other.

Archival memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change. (Taylor, 2003, p. 19)

The repertoire, on the other hand, enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing— in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. Repertoire, etymologically “a treasury, an inventory,” also allows for individual agency, referring also to “the finder, discoverer,” and meaning “to find out.” The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by “being there,” being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning. (Taylor, 2003, p. 21)

While I do not necessarily agree with the division she draws, Taylor provides us with an understanding of how oral histories, rituals, dances, indigenous knowledge and embodied practice can become part of the body of things we know about a culture through repetition. Through repetition of performances, including the telling of myths, all those

things “the origins of which”, Cederlund argues, “disappear into the shadows of prehistory” (2011, p. 31) are kept alive.

Even though excluded by Taylor, I would argue that images, with their fluid and ambiguous nature, are part of the canon of intangible evidence – especially if they are found outside of context. These performative and oral elements of the archive are by no means inferior or less useful. Instead, as Derrida explains, these kinds of ‘impressions’ are particularly powerful (1998, p.29). “Images are a better way of communicating with the future than language” Werner Herzog says in *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (1:24).

Both tangible and intangible evidence, Taylor argues, “usually work in tandem” (2003, p. 21). In *The Chimera Principle*, Severi similarly argues that the divide between written and oral knowledge transmission is fallacious, particularly in the way the two are often assumed to be opposites (2015, p. 13).

Again, however, the key to gaining an understanding of Tsumkwe lies in how it is conceptually approached by outsiders. While oral and written traditions are usually interlinked as both Severi and Taylor argue, it is significant that some cultures, such as Euro-American traditions, consider themselves to be “founded upon written memories” (Severi, 2015, p. 23) and in opposition to cultures that make use of evocative, oral, and performative mnemonic tools.

## CONJECTURE AND GATEKEEPERS

Memories and knowledge that are “often plural and often antagonistic” (Severi, 2015, p. 22) and knowledge that is simultaneously maintained and transformed through performance, complicate the existence of an archive proper. Images, which my framework understands to be weaving throughout the context of this thesis, are neither neatly bound, nor can they be neatly structured into an archive. When an archive is of, or dominated by, images, its boundaries begin to dissolve and contain the same ambiguous and dialectical qualities that images possess (see Chapter One).

Bieseke points out that the lack of pinned down, written moral codes, in favour of oral traditions means that the Ju|’hoansi are somewhat more free to act pragmatically and flexibly (Bieseke, 1993, pp. 53-54). Like so much in Ju|’hoan culture, rules of conduct are malleable and change with context.

From the vantage point of Euro-American visitors, however, this more flexible framework is at the same time frustrating (as this thesis will discuss in later chapters) and fascinating. As Graeber puts it in his introduction to *The Chimera Principle*, the references provided by oral traditions are

to some degree unfinished, teasingly schematic in such a way as to, almost perforce, mobilize the imaginative powers of the recipient to fill in the blanks (Graeber, 2015, p. xi)

The vagueness of what can be collected and the weakness of tangible evidence leads to conjecture and self-projection into the imagined past. In Werner Herzog's film, one scientist automatically assumes the painter of the cave paintings to be male (her colleague interjects that it may just as well have been a female painter). Even though one of the scientists says "we cannot recreate the past. The past is lost" (0:17:00), the film is full of researchers who project their own intuitive understanding at the visual artefacts. "You can imagine people dancing with the shadows" one of them says. Throughout, we are given interpretations which are firmly rooted in the researchers' imagination.

At the set of *Vikings*, conjecture and self-projection are conscious, purposeful acts which fill in the large gaps between what existing artefacts suggest is authentic Vikings culture.

*We know that they had long hair and braids. But what braids exactly there is no way of knowing. So we created something which we thought would visually communicate the kind of warriors they were and distinguish them from the English. But we also thought about what would have been practical and what will look good. (Jody, head of hair department)*

This braided hairstyle has, over a short period of time, created a new, visual brand for Vikings. The internet is awash with tutorials for the "Lagertha" or Vikings hairstyle.

In Tsumkwe, tourists, researchers, NGO workers and other travellers tend to see in San culture whatever suits their purpose or desire.

*It's a privilege to experience their culture. Like, it's a powerful thought that these would have been the kind of dances that our early ancestors danced around the fire (tourist, anonymous)*



*We have so many lessons to learn from these noble people. Their knowledge is the only thing that can protect us from exploiting mother earth (Karl, self-identified 'philanthropic traveller')*

*If you think about how challenging their traditional life must have been, with long periods of starvation, and high infant mortality, it's no wonder that they would rather be drunk in Tsumkwe than out in the bush (NGO worker, anonymous)*

The most striking incident of self-projection and conjecture, however, is experimental archaeology. While there are some experimental archaeology studies of the Vikings, this is a particularly prevalent phenomenon in relation to prehistoric hunter-gatherers.

Werner Herzog's film provides an entertaining example when an experimental archaeologist unimpressively attempts to launch a spear with a suspected Stone Age tool. The man clarifies that 'paleolithic man' would have been better at this (1:05:00).

Because of these shortcomings of modern man versus paleolithic man, it is often San people, and particularly Ju|'hoansi who have to step in their place, throwing spears and making stone tools under the watchful eye of experimental archaeologists. This approach is problematic. Gary's experimental archaeology study, for example, showed that the San could not easily throw the kind of spear he hypothesised might have existed in prehistoric times. Gary himself, however, could - simply because he was a foot taller. Nonetheless, these reverse performances, which infer imagined bodily actions and activities upon people of the past, remain part of the canon of San and Viking identity construction.

The potential for self-projection and the evocative power of the kind of archive we are dealing with here leads to two things. Firstly, the investment into subjective truth is bound up with a sense of self. If one's sense of self, in a search for origin, is connected with one's interpretation of what ancient hunter-gatherers were doing, any criticism of that interpretation might feel very personal. This may well be one of the reasons why subjective interpretations of authenticity are so insular in Tsumkwe.

Secondly, and more importantly, a multitude of truths are allowed to exist. This stands in direct contrast to the hegemony an archive is normally supposed to produce. In the archive proper, gatekeepers decide what is and is not authentic, what is archived and what

forgotten (Zeitlyn, 2012, p. 463). While gatekeepers do exist in Tsumkwe, their power is somewhat limited and they do not necessarily agree on what should be preserved for future generations. The fight between Marshall and Bieseke (see Chapter One) might serve as an example. While Marshall envisaged one future for the San, Bieseke favoured another. While Bieseke might have ostensibly ‘won’ the fight, the previous chapters show that Marshall’s influence is still echoing strongly through Nyae Nyae and does not seem to be about to go away (see Chapter Two). Meanwhile, San scholars worldwide still disagree on some of the fundamentals of who the San are (see Chapter One).

Another, and possibly more important reason for the weakened position of gatekeepers is the kind of material that is being archived. Much of the archive consists, as I argued above, of ritual, oral, and interpretative performance. As we know from Taylor (2003, p. 21), performative storage turns every individual who takes part in the production of cultural products in Tsumkwe into a gatekeeper, including San, researchers, tourists and NGO workers. Gatekeeper power may not be distributed equally – some Ju|’hoansi might have more power in one area of the archive than others – but it is distributed widely.

## The Pre-Archive

As we have seen, while the notion of the archive is a useful one to talk about the attraction of the past and the governing of knowledge, we need to adapt this somewhat for our purposes here. I will, for the remainder of this thesis refer to this particular version of the archive as the ‘Pre-Archive’.

The Pre-Archive, in contrast to the archive proper, is characterised by a lack of hegemony, by referring to a time somewhere between mythology and the beginning of recorded (properly archived) history. Occupying this specific tension, the Pre-Archive needs some tangible artefacts to make it feel real, but largely consist of powerfully evocative impressions made up of records such as stories, performance, ritual, play or images.

Bieseke argues that the “storytelling way of making social sense” – and this I believe is significant for all modes of knowledge transmissions in the Pre-Archive – “is by its nature continually **creative and re-creative**; it actually has its being only in its new performances” (1993, p. 65, my emphasis).

What exists only in the moment through creative performance cannot be archived in the same way as written records. This reference framework is “based on respect for the multiplicity of specific pieces of information” and explains a tendency to avoid generalisation among San (Bieseles, 1993, p. 54). A San dance, for instance, is what it is performed as in the moment, with no universally right or wrong way of doing it. Where Euro-American visitors often feel the need to classify dances as authentic or inauthentic, the Ju|’hoansi make no such judgements.

However, it is not only the way of knowledge transmission and the Ju|hoansi’s way of making sense of the world which makes Tsumkwe into a pre-archival space. Outsiders, too, significantly contribute. Bataille speaks of “dazzling power” (2009, p. 97), “unsophisticated magic” (2009, p. 81) and a “richness” (2009, p. 103) that one encounters in the context of prehistoric images. ‘Not knowing’, he argues, feeds belief and sensations of spirituality (2009, p. 122). The pre-archival space is rendered more powerful precisely because it refuses universality and generalisation. Nyae Nyae becomes mystical and powerful to visitors precisely because it is imagined as the antipode to their own life - pinned down, dominated and structured by written records.

This is in no way to suggest that other archives do not rely on intangible impressions. However, both the notion of the San and of the Vikings are embedded in tensions of archaeology and myth in such a way that they provide a powerful landscape for self-projection and multiple truths.

In the Pre-Archive, there exist vastly different versions of the San and “different types of species Viking” (Cederlund, 2011, p. 18); Archaeological objects are pitted against the vastness of mystique, beliefs and oral traditions which engulf this time. Isolated artefacts have to inhabit a landscape that is so sparse, it gets furnished by the imagination; myth and history blend into each other seamlessly.

In the Pre-Archive, |’Ui knows that his people used to use stone, rather than metal arrow heads. But whether he knows this from his own people or from Archaeologists can no longer be disentangled.

In the Pre-Archive, a German experimental archaeologist, dressed up in ‘Inuit’ clothes plays *The Stars and Stripes* on a reconstructed prehistoric flute. (*Cave of Forgotten Dreams*); A T.S. Eliot Poem seamlessly blends into a 21st century imagination of Viking culture.

In the Pre-Archive, truths dance around each other, rather than competing directly, forever just about to establish one archive that puts them in order; Time collides, speeds up and slows down.

In the Pre-Archive, the vision of a white boy who staged a film about hunting 60 years ago can make middle aged Ju|'hoansi nostalgic for something they may have lost and incite their children to play the kind games that ring with embodied traditional knowledge.



## 5. TRICKSTERING

*We are locked in history and they were not*

(Werner Herzog)

*At the movies, I learn to be surprised at my capacity to live in many worlds at once*

(Schefer, 1980, p. 9)

In this chapter, I interrogate how the seemingly contradictory space of the Pre-Archive may be inhabited. I am interested in what models can be used to think about the way in which the Ju|'hoansi traverse boundaries of individual notions and images of San-ness and combine incommensurable elements into new creative forms. While this chapter is no longer closely oriented along the comparison between Tsumkwe and the film set, it still occasionally refers to it as a framework and explanatory illustration. The models, which the two spaces give rise to, work equally as well in each other respectively. The actor is a useful model to think about Tsumkwe and the Trickster can help us think about the film set.

I argue that whether we use the model of the Nomad, actor, or Trickster to understand the way in which the Ju|'hoansi are at ease with apparent contradictions and inhabit the images of the Pre-Archive flexibly, they all require a certain level of 'mastery' which knows when to slip into a truth and when to break down its boundaries

I begin this chapter with the caveat that arguments about San rationality are not made in a political vacuum. The San remain discriminated against in Namibia, and one of the narratives that drive this discrimination is the assumption that the San are incapable of logical thinking, a notion linked to their association with immature children (as discussed in Chapter Two).

Of course, it is not only in popular discourse that we find arguments about indigenous people being considered incapable of logical thought. Lévy-Bruhl, in his book *Primitive Mentality*, suggests that there are fundamental differences between civilised and primitive

types of thought. Evans-Prichard adds some clarity and nuance to Lévy-Bruhl's position when he says:

He does not mean that primitives are incapable of thinking correctly, but merely that most of their beliefs are incompatible with a critical and scientific view of the universe (Evans-Pritchard, 1965, p. 81)

Evans-Prichard explains of how different types of thought are inherently coherent. While his perspective may be helpful in adding nuance to Lévy-Bruhl's position, it still alludes to too binary and bounded a conception to be useful for my material. Rather than framing the questions of this chapter as issues of primitive or civilised thought, I show how both Ju|'hoansi and Irish actors can travel between different images and ways of sense making.

When speaking about how contradictions are inhabited, it is therefore important to point at the fact that core elements of San culture, such as hunting techniques, are based on what an outside observer might refer to as the 'scientific method' (Blurton Jones & Konner, 1976). At the same time, the Ju|'hoansi seem to be at ease with inhabiting conflicting versions of San identity for the benefit of outside observers as discussed in the previous chapter.

A look at anthropology's engagement with contradiction reveals that much of what we think of as 'contradiction' is simply incommensurability – an incompatibility between different ways of thinking - or compartmentalisation. While both are useful concepts in this context, they do not help us understand how exactly boundaries of the conceivable are broken down and merged.

In looking for models to enrich my understanding of how the Pre-Archive is inhabited, I begin with the Nomad. I begin in practical terms, by arguing that rather than having become settled, the Ju|'hoansi have merely adapted their mobility to the socio-economic demands of their situation. I then suggest that we might apply this same mobility to the spheres of multiple identities – a point I refer back to throughout this and the next chapter.

The notion of travelling between different spheres, however, does not directly address tensions of authenticity, a demand for which Tsumkwe is defined by. In the next section I discuss a film one of the Ju|'hoansi made. This film, which simultaneously copies and innovates the genre of San documentaries illustrates well the way in which elements of the archive can be broken down and reconfigured.

Staying on the theme of film I then discuss how actors on the film set can provide a model for thinking about being two different people at once. This section also illustrates that fictional characters and identities can be taken just as seriously as ‘real’ people.

My final model for engaging with contradictory states of being comes from San epistemology in the form of the ‘Bushman Trickster’. Able to travel through time and between categories such as life and death, the Trickster is the ideal model for moving through the Pre-Archive. Not all Ju|’hoansi are Tricksters, but those who are, flourish in this space.

## Track Reading and Contradictions

*I was just thinking about a Gemsbok we stalked I did not understand.*

*One Gemsbok, standing on this side was behind the bush. We shot, and the arrow went over.*

*The one standing on the other side I shot. It seemed to me that the Gemsbok turned around and my arrow went over.*

*[then we looked for tracks and collected all the arrows]*

*When we came there I saw the broken arrow. I said “it is broken, it was broken by the gravia bush”. Then I see him [the other hunter] finding blood on the ground. He said, I think you hit the Gemsbok.*

*I was confused, was it a good shot? Because it seemed to me that the Gemsbok had turned around. But it turned out it must be a very good shot by the blade nearby the neck.*

The above is a story told by a hunter in a film made by Joel. I go into more detail about this film further below, but this particular quote serves to illustrate a point I wish to emphasise before embarking on a chapter on contradictions and non-linear logic.

It is often insinuated, by Black and White Namibians alike, that the reason for San being economically disadvantaged is because they cannot think rationally. Several



organisations across Namibia, for example the *Ombili* Foundation, specifically dedicate their efforts to 're-educate' the San so they can 'join' modern society. At a smaller scale, I often witnessed NGOs in Tsumke make decisions for the San because they did not trust the Ju|'hoansi to make the most logical choices. Tourist could often be overheard calling what they considered the San's "failure to progress" a "mindset problem" (anonymous source).

There are issues at play here which are deeply grounded in racism and colonialism (for an exploration of those issues see for example *The Bushman Myth: The making of a Namibian Underclass* by Robert Gordon). The subject of the processes which reinforce the idea that the Ju|'hoansi are unable to think logically would deserve its own chapter but goes beyond the scope of this thesis. It is important to mention nonetheless to clarify that my exploration of Nomadism, performance and the Trickster, are in no way to suggest a diminished ability to reason on behalf of the Ju|'hoansi.

In fact, reading tracks - a skill which hunters repeatedly explained to me lies at the heart of being San because for men it is the most important aspect of survival in the bush and connection to the land - is highly scientific. Firmly based in the rule of non-contradiction, it is a process of analysing the available information, discussing it and agreeing on what is the most logical explanation ("Even though I first thought I had not hit the Gemsbok, it turns out I must have been wrong because there was blood on the ground"; "the bok passed here in the early morning because the tracks of a beetle that is only active in the morning cover it") using knowledge about the behaviour of insects, animals, plants, the sand and the weather (see also Blurton Jones & Konner, 1976, p. 328).

One of Boyscout's favourite stories is about the time when he and some other esteemed track readers were called to France to read human tracks in an ancient cave. The archaeologists had hypothesised that fossilised tracks which had been found in a part of the cave with a very low ceiling had been the site of a ritualistic youth initiation dance which was performed in a crouched position. After analysing the tracks, Boyscout concluded that the tracks were of one child and one adult who had been mining clay in an upright position. The logical conclusion, for Boyscout, was that the ceiling of the cave must have moved. The scientists disagreed and it came to a rift which caused an interruption of the research. However, after geological tests, the scientists had to agree that the ceiling of the cave had in fact moved.

As this story shows, Ju|'hoansi are perfectly able to productively speak to scientific discourses. To argue that the Ju|'hoansi are simply not able to perceive contradiction, would thus evidently be erroneous. Admittedly, when Evans-Pritchard argues that “Prelogical, applied to primitive mentality, means simply that it does not go out of its way, as we do, to avoid contradiction” (Evans-Pritchard, 1965, p. 82) he does not suggest that ‘primitives’, which he presumably would consider the Ju|'hoansi to belong to, are incapable of academic thinking, merely that they are not as bound by it. However, even if we shift the focus of the dichotomy between ‘primitive’ and ‘civilised’ thought and understand it to mean that it is ‘civilised thought’ which is limited (by being bound to non-contradiction), we are still reinforcing this imagined divide. If, on the other hand, we use the way images are inhabited and traversed as a way to engage with the subject, as this chapter will show, we can see that the ability to inhabit contradiction is not exclusive to so-called ‘primitives’.

#### CONTRADICTIONS OF SAN-NESS

One of the things that struck me most during my fieldwork was how Ju|'hoansi would enact different versions of San-ness depending on the social situation. Some of those versions, to me, seemed to contradict each other. How could one person wear skins in the evening and the next day confirm the belief of a different traveller that skins are ‘not real’ without being disingenuous?

The continued existence of the pre-archival nature of Tsumkwe suggests that the San give credence to many different interpretations of San culture. When tourists visit, filmmakers come to shoot a movie, or NGOs pitch their projects, the Ju|'hoansi rarely seem to contest the interpretations those outsiders bring with them. I sought clarification on this in a conversation with George, Joel and Komtsa one evening. “I’m going to ask you a tricky question, guys.” I said.

*You show one kind of San to one group, and another kind of San to another group. You tell one organisation you want to farm, because you want to develop and the next that you need to hunt because it is your only way to live. But everybody who comes here, all kinds of tourists, scientists, people like Karl, you agree with all of them.*

“HMMMMM.” Joel and Komtsa agreed, somewhat ironically.

“So if the San are one thing one moment and one the next”, I pushed on “does that mean you are faking it?”

“You see,” George replied, “we are Ju|’hoansi we are the people who talk a lot and we always have to agree. We don’t like conflict.”

“No, it’s not fake,” Komtsa disagreed, waving George’s remark away as if it had been in bad spirit. “It’s all real. We don’t lie.”

“But some of it is contradictory” I insisted. “How can something be authentic and fake at the same time?”

Komtsa thought for a moment. Finally he said “Sometimes it’s just like a job. We just do what we know they want to see”

At this point, George joined back in the conversation.

*Who are the San? Nobody is right, and everybody is right. Just some people want to see this and others that.*

“But what about yourself? What does being San mean to you?” I insist.

“This is my home...,” Joel replies

*... and I am happiest when I am in the bush. I have been to London and Washington and some other places. They are all nice but I just want to be in the bush, hunting.*

“You are a TERRIBLE hunter,” Komtsa laughs.

“I know but I like it.” Joel admits.

“The thing with authenticity and the tourists is this” George suddenly said as if he had been thinking about it

*of course it's all real. I am Ju|'hoan and this is my way of living and thinking.  
So maybe you say it's fake and they say it's not fake – it doesn't matter. It  
does not need to make sense. I am Ju|'hoan wherever I am and that is all  
there is to this.*

While the subject of contradiction has not been studied comprehensively, it has made a “recurrent appearance in the discipline” (Berliner, et al., 2016, p. 6). In a debate from 2016, Berliner, Lambek, Schweder, Irvine and Piette review existing approaches and bring together a useful vocabulary of terms. Throughout the debate, two points emerge quite distinctly: What may at first sight look like a contradiction, can often be thought of as compartmentalisation, incommensurability, or simply insincerity.

The above conversation quite insistently explains that insincerity, or ‘faking’, is not an appropriate analytical tool here. Compartmentalisation and incommensurability, on the other hand, seem to somewhat describe what George, Joel and Komtsa were talking about regarding giving into different interpretations of San-ness.

While both compartmentalisation and incommensurability offer useful and clarifying insight into the study of what the anthropologist might consider contradictions, I find them at risk of being somewhat limiting when applied to the pre-archival space I established in the previous chapter. These concepts suggest, to a degree, bounded systems of knowledge which can only be traversed by disassociation and/or translation. I argue that a more productive way of talking about ‘contradictions’ in this context is by discussing techniques of movement across different images.

## The Nomad

As the subject of ongoing anthropological fascination, the figure of the Nomad has been firmly established as a mode for peoples to move and think outside of state power by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). As the antithesis to stasis, order and government, it would make sense to consider whether the way Nomads are considered to move might help us understand how the San can inhabit the space set up in the previous chapter. What can

the tension between mobility and stasis, between inside and outside the state, tell us about living on the peripheries of the archive?

Peters (2006) shows that the Nomad is in fact chiefly a symptom of the European imagination. He argues that the idea of the Nomad is a way of coming to terms with being settled and establishing a sense of governable self. This argument resonates with this thesis' general themes. As I showed in chapter Two and Three, San images are defined by and for outsiders. Possibly, what we can hope to learn about the Ju|'hoansi by applying the model of the Nomad might be limited. It might, in fact, tell us more about European modes of imagining.

Another critique of *Nomadology* comes from Marder:

The conceptual problem with nomadism is that [...] it functions as a dumping ground for unresolved antinomies – movement and rest, anarchy and order, numeric abstraction and concrete placement – thrown together in the absence of any mediations (Marder, 2016, p. 496/497)

However, I agree with Engebrigsten that Deleuze and Guattari's work is still a productive and enlightening way of thinking about mobility (2017, p. 43). After all, it is 'unresolved antimonies' (fake/real) I am trying to explore and my own (arguably biased) mind set is, after all, European. Even if the above criticisms are correct, they are at the very least an indication that nomadism as a concept might be a useful starting point for this chapter.

### ARE THE JU|'HOANSI NOMADS?

On a literal note, a point of departure when thinking about nomadism might be the question of how mobile the San, who are traditionally thought of as roaming the Kalahari in search of game, water and veldfruit, are. Of course, even traditional San mobility is centered around *n!ore*, waterholes which individual groups 'own' and can decide to share. Traditional mobility is not random and happens according to complex social rules within a set territory within which an individual band has the right to roam (Lee, 1972, p. 129). How strictly that maps on to the definition of nomadism proper is debatable.

However, along with the enduring notion in the public imagination that the San are, at the this very moment, at the brink of extinction they are often thought to have lost their mobile way of life.

At first sight, Tsumkwe seems to provide a case in point. In addition to the settlement of Tsumkwe, there are some thirty distinct villages which have remained constant enough that the same map has been used for the last 20 years<sup>16</sup>. Traditionally, camps would have moved every few months according to the availability of resources. Instead, the situation in Tsumkwe is that the villages stay where they are because each of them has a water pump installed. As John Marshall points out (1993, pp. 51-59), water is one of the most defining and powerful factors in Nyae Nyae. Since the area was cut down in 1976, the area available to the Ju|'hoansi has no permanent water holes. Supplying water pumps, an initiative that was originally spear headed by the Nyae Nyae cattle fund and since taken over by the Namibian government, makes all the difference between being able to live in the bush or not.

However, while the availability of water is of course essential for the Ju|'hoansi, many feel that, inadvertently, this has deprived them of the ability to live traditionally.

*In the old days this time of year was very good. We would follow the game or the Mangetti nuts. But now there is nothing to gather near the village (Joseph)*

*If I go to the food I die of thirst. If I stay by the water, I must live off maize meal (Bao)*

*In the old days, there was a time of scarcity and a time of plenty. Now there is always scarcity because even during the rainy season we stay at the village. (/’Ui)*

The logic behind the predicament is simple. To live as a hunter-gatherer, it is imperative to move around and follow the game or the veldfruit. The water pumps bind the San to static locations. But it is not only the availability of water that contributes to the settlements. The villages, fixed in a location that can be entered into a GPS, are also the place where government handouts are delivered, where pensioners who receive their state

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<sup>16</sup> The exact number is difficult to pin down since some villages have been abandoned and a couple of new small new villages have emerged. On the whole, however, the map of Nyae Nyae and its infrastructure has remained more or less the same, according to Arno and two Ju|'hoan hunters.

pension are registered, where tourists go and NGOs conduct their projects. In the words of a German traveller:

*It is very sad that they can no longer roam freely. But this is the way of modernity. If they want to be part of it – and we cannot deny them this – then moving around all the time just becomes less and less possible.*  
(translated from German)

It would seem, according to this and understanding the Nomad as evading state power, that the state has won; that it has managed to render the San governable by putting them in fixed settlements and getting them hooked on all the state, tourists and NGOs have to offer. Whether they are less free, and what kind of freedom we are talking about when we as ‘Westerners’ note their loss of it would go in the direction of Peters’ (2006) analysis and beyond the scope of this section. The point I wish to emphasis is that, based on the establishment of settlements and the way many people, including the Jul’hoansi, are talking about mobility, it would seem that any Nomadism has come to a halt in Tsumkwe. For the remainder of this section, however, I will show that mobility has merely adapted and not disappeared.

#### WATER CANNISTERS

Daniela was a 33-year-old NGO worker from Germany who managed a project for an organisation located in Windhoek. The project consisted of encouraging and supporting people in Nyae Nyae and N#u Jaqna (the conservancy East of Tsumkwe), in their mission statement labelled as San, to harvest and process Devil’s Claw and sell it back to the organisation who marketed it worldwide under a Fairtrade label.

Devil’s Claw is a root, found across Southern Africa which, ground up and dried, has been used in traditional San medicine. The roots, after being harvested are cut into chunks and dried on sheets. They are then ground and boiled in water, and after being left to stew overnight can be drunk the next morning as a painkiller. The root has recently gained popularity worldwide as an anti-inflammatory and specifically as a remedy for arthritis.

The difficulty of monetising Devil’s claw, according to Daniela, lies in the fact that it seems to be impossible to farm. Instead, it has to be harvested wild, while taking care to

not remove the entire root but rather leave some parts to make sure that the area keeps providing devils claw in the future.

Daniela's organisation wants to offer the San an alternative – that is alternative to the tourism industry – way of income by supporting them in gathering Devil's Claw traditionally and monetising it. The emphasis of this project lies in the attempt to provide independent means of income to the San.

The Devils Claw is collected and processed by the Ju|'hoansi and the organisation then buys by the bag, and gatherers are paid by the Kilo. At the time of my field work, an adult could make 600 to 900 Namibia Dollars (£50-80) a month for two or three months a year. Personally, I found this price to be very low compared to how much Devil's Claw products sell for internationally, but Daniela argued that the work her organisation was offering the San was still more gainful than any other work that was available to them. The project went on for several years and was bound to change significantly (in a yet undetermined direction) when Daniela finally left Namibia to return to Germany.

One evening, Daniela told me an anecdote of what had happened the year before:

*For years, the people kept saying 'we want water canisters and maybe something to transport them'. But the budget was really tight so it never really happened. But then last year in a meeting back in Windhoek they asked me what we can do to make the project better, so I told them that the San wanted something to carry water so they could go deeper into the bush and would not have to return to the village all the time. So we got them some water canisters and some big barrels and immediately they took off. They hired a car from someone and brought the barrels of water deep into the bush and just left their village.*

This trend quickly spread across other villages who were taking part in the project. Upon first hearing this story, I was inclined to think of it as a renaissance of Nomadism. However, when I asked some of the people who had spear headed the canister usage, my hypothesis was not met with the profound reflection I had expected.



*If we want to go somewhere the only thing that can stop us is water. Before the barrels, we could only go as far as we could carry water. Now we can go further. (|Ui)*

Rather than completely reinstalling a lost sense of mobility, the water barrels simply expanded the distance of a trajectory that had already existed beforehand. Without the Devil's Claw project, they struggled to get the barrels of water moved around the bush, they explained. But when I returned a few months later and did not find anybody at the village, I was later told that all the people had moved closer to a Mangetti tree. When I asked how they were getting water there I was told that "someone" had moved the barrels for them.

My observations throughout my time in Nyae Nyae showed that, despite the way mobility was spoken about as being a thing of the past, people were extremely mobile. More than a few times I was asked to give a lift to someone from one village to another. Even though I tried to comply as often as possible – it is very bad etiquette in Namibia to deny a lift and marks one out as a tourist – sometimes I was unable to. One time, for instance, I refused a lift to the son of one of the hunters in Nhoma who was due at a court hearing in Tsumkwe because he had stabbed someone. I refused both because I was annoyed by the way the teenager asked and because I was actually not going to Tsumke the next day. When I enquired a few days later whether he had made it in time for his court hearing, his father, responded "of course. [...]He just walked, It's not far if you go through the bush".

This example was indicative of experiences I made repeatedly. Each time I asked whether someone I refused a lift had made it, the answer was affirmative. Each time, the person had been on time, often hitching a ride with someone else but often simply walking. The distance between Nhoma and Tsumkwe, if walked straight through the bush is 20 km – a distance most people in Tsumkwe were happy to walk. I once looked for Joseph (in Nhoma) to be told that he had left that morning to go and get some tobacco at "the farm" and that he would most likely be back in the evening. A trip to the farm in question and back was about 35 km.

Eliza, who in Grootfontein was rarely willing to even walk to the shops, was, when in Tsumkwe, happy to walk long distances at a time to visit her cousins. The workshop which was described in the previous chapter was almost not attended because the

transport I had organised for the group from Tsumkwe to Grootfontein fell through. I was unsuccessful in trying to find someone else with a car and in addition, the petrol station in Tsumkwe was broken and unable to sell Diesel. On the phone to Joel I tried to come up with solutions of how to get the group here the next day. I called ten minutes later because another idea had occurred to me but my call did not get connected. Three hours later, on time for the start of the workshop, the entire group arrived. With neither petrol, a car nor any money, the group of 14 had managed to travel the 300 km spontaneously.

“If we want to get somewhere, we get there” Komtsa commented with a wink, echoing what the informant above had said about the increased mobility that had come with the water barrels.

Throughout my fieldwork I kept trying to ascertain how many people lived in Tsumkwe. This interest was shared by George who had been trying to find out the very same thing for years. However, the task, as I found out when I enquired with several institutions, was daunting. One man, who was employed by the government to assist the traditional authority, had once tried to count the people in Tsumkwe. Moving from hut to hut and house to house he took note of how many people were living in each. He eventually realised, however, that many people appeared several times on his records.

*It took me a while to figure this out because everybody has the same name here. It's always |Ui or ≠Toma or something... but a lot of people change their names also. But with some people, I recognised their face.*

*I think it's maybe 2000 at a time. But the people this week might be different than next week. Maybe next week it's a different 2000. (John, assistant to the Traditional Authority)*

People were simply moving around too much within Tsumkwe to be counted properly. Further, many people moved in between Tsumkwe and the villages and in between the villages and back and forth to Grootfontein. This became particularly evident when trying to find people. Often, I would look for someone in what I thought was their home, only to be told that they had moved elsewhere. Normally, people only moved to relatives, but due to the way Ju|'hoansi forge relationships through name giving, almost everybody was

related to everybody. For several weeks, I attempted to keep track of the movements of some of my key informants to gain a better understanding of this flexibility. However, motivations varied much too widely to recognise any overarching patterns. People moved, for example, because they had a fight with the people they were living with, because the people they were moving to had a lot of food, because they were tired of looking after the children, because they missed their cousins, because the electricity was unreliable, because their uncle was drinking too much, because they wanted to look after someone, because something interesting was happening at the other place, or, and this was a very frequently cited reason, just because they felt like it. The impression this gave was that rather than needing a reason to move, the people in Tsumkwe would have needed a reason to stay.

Mobility in Nyae Nyae has adapted, rather than disappeared. Barnard (Cashdan, et al., 1983, p. 55) argues that San band coherency declines with the availability of water. In this sense, Marshall is proven right. It is all about the water. During low water availability, people stick together to better protect the resources they have. In times of water abundance though, such as in Tsumkwe or the villages, people travel individually.

The Ju|'hoansi may no longer roam the Kalahari in bands following the availability of veld fruit or game. But they are still moving ceaselessly individually or in smaller groups, following whatever reason there is to move.

For the remainder of this chapter I want to explore the possibility that the Ju|'hoansi inhabit the Pre-Archive - which I established in the previous chapter – nomadically. I argue that to be creative within the Pre-Archive it is important to not be bound by static rules of what is or is not real, an argument which will ultimately bring me back to the set of Vikings and allow me to make a more general argument about creative spaces.

To make the connection between living nomadically by being geographically mobile and inhabiting the Pre-Archive nomadically, I want to begin with a particularly multi-layered piece of ethnographic evidence. The film I discuss below (and quoted earlier on in this chapter), made by one of the filmmaking workshop participants, touches on the theme of nostalgia and tradition, discussed in the previous chapter.

## JOEL'S FILM

Throughout the filmmaking workshop, the desire to make films about traditional San life came up repeatedly. This presented me with a conundrum. On the one hand, people of course had the right to make whatever films they liked. I did not want to shape the direction the films took more than necessary and saw my role distinctly as that of a technical facilitator, rather than someone providing guidance. On the other hand, I felt uneasy about Ju|'hoansi creating what I then believed to be a mere copy of films they had seen other people make. I was worried that the Ju|'hoansi were so caught up in the films made about them that they could not conceive of anything else worth filming. So, much to my discredit, I kept discouraging the participants from making films about their traditional life. To me, the risk of them simply copying a romantic interpretation made by some White person, copying documentary formats through which harmful myths about the San had been perpetuated, was not worth it. I was clearly quite caught up in my own structures of what was valuable and true and what was not.

About halfway through my fieldwork, I left Tsumkwe for three weeks. When I returned, Joel sent me a text message a few hours before my arrival. It read "I am sorry, we did something you probably will not like". Worried that something had happened to the equipment I arranged to meet up with him before I even set up camp. To my relief, what had happened was that him and some other team members had taken the camera to Nhoma and made a film about traditional San life.

The film called *The Hunter's Plan* is ten minutes long and was entirely, from conception through production and post-production, made by Ju|'hoansi. Starting with a sunrise and finishing with a sunset, it depicts the activities which unfold in Nhoma throughout the course of the day. Long shots drive the narrative which starts with typical morning activities and then goes on to show the preparation for the hunt, the hunt itself, the cutting of the meat and the eating of the meat. The cyclical character of the film, suggested in choosing sunrise and sunset as beginning and end points, is reinforced by it ending on children playing with bow and arrow.

Personally, I was extremely moved by the film. There were several reasons for this. One of the things that struck me, and which several people I have shown the film since confirmed, is that the people being filmed look much more at ease than in any other film I have seen about traditional San life. Most importantly, however, the film made me realise

how ridiculous and wrong I had been to suggest that the workshop participants should not make films about the Ju|'hoansi merely because I thought a film like this would be less valuable for possibly being shaped by documentaries previously made by non-San.

To be sure, the film does strongly echo the many documentary style films which have been made about the San. One scene illustrates this particularly well. As the hunt is depicted, the film makes use of one of the iconic images which can be found throughout a wealth of visual material about the San: A hunter, dressed in a loin cloth, stalking through the bush on all fours in pursuit of game. The camera moves behind him, the same way he is tracking the animal. This shot, or variations thereof, is very common in documentaries which show the San hunting.

According to Strong (2015), the hunt is a particularly popular motif for films about the San not because it is particularly visually impressive but because it stimulates (especially the young male) mind. The history of attempting to show the San hunting has its beginnings in Marshall's film *The Hunters*. Later on, Marshall had regrets about the film because he felt that his boyish fascination with the hunt obscured his view for what was "really going on" (Marshall, 1993, p. 39). Other critics accused Marshall of having faked the key hunting scene, that the hunt, which is depicted as singular, actually took place over several dates and that the hunters are not always the same throughout the film (Gonzalez, 1993).

Whatever the degree to which Marshall 'staged' the film, there was a simple reason for it: despite its iconic place in the imagination of San traditional life, the way in which San hunt traditionally is notoriously difficult to film (Gonzalez, 1993, p. 187). The process is usually characterised by a lot of stalking and shooting poison arrows through the thicket at barely visible animals, not to mention the fact that the success rate is extremely low. If, against all odds, the animal is shot, it usually has to be followed for several days. All of this happens in thick and bleak bush. There is simply not a lot to film. Getting a good 'shot' of a San shooting an animal, becomes a sort of 'meta hunt'. During my fieldwork, I spoke to three different filmmakers, two in Nhoma, one in Tsumkwe who all admitted that they had been surprised by how nigh impossible it was to shoot an actual San hunt. Because of this difficulty, filmmakers often revert to focussing on the stalking hunter, crawling through the bush on all fours.



*stills from "The Hunter's Plan" (reproduced with permission from Joel)*

In many ways, Joel's way of picturing the hunt seems to copy this established format. An establishing shot pictures the animals (filmed separately), before the film cuts to the stalking hunter. However, two things are ever so slightly different in this rendition of the iconic stalking shot. The first difference is the way the hunter moves, the second is how the camera moves.

The movement of the camera is of course dictated by the person holding it. In this case, the camera operator was able to crawl through the bush with the same ease as the person being filmed, reminding us that the subject of the scene is being stalked as well as stalking. The fact that the person filming him knows how to move through the bush has, in turn, an effect on the person in front.

"Moving through the bush quietly is a skill you learn over many many years", |Ui says in a conversation where he explains to me that learning how to shoot a bow and arrow is the easiest part of hunting and takes only weeks or months to master. It is the movement through the bush which truly makes a good hunter. Thus, where normally the camera behind the hunter will move through the bush so awkwardly and loudly that any actual stalking of an animal would be impossible, the fact that the camera operator is themselves Ju|'hoan has created a different kind of aesthetic. The two hunters are acting and enacting at the same time. They are both performing (a term I will problematize further down in this chapter but want to use in its innocent unassuming way of "doing something for the benefit of an observer") and hunting.

The frame and pretext of this moment is arguably a replication of the way outsiders have depicted hunts through film previously. The technology and aesthetic arrangement of the shot might be imports from European and American filmmaking practices. These are by now so entrenched in Tsumkwe that it would be a purely hypothetical exercise to imagine what film would look like here without any outside influence. Embedded in this process of replication, however, is the unique relationship of the two hunters to their environment and to their cultural tradition of hunting.

True to Derrida's notion of the archive we have an artefact here which is evidence of one of the Ju|'hoansi's own desire to record and keep traditional practices. True to Derrida's understanding of repetition and Taylor's emphasis on performance in repetition (see Chapter Four), it is through repetition that an artefact is created here; the

repetition of the aesthetics and filmmaking choices on the one hand, and the repetition of hunting practices on the other.

But where, here, would the 'authentic' be located? Is the film authentic because a San made it? Is it authentic because it shows traditional practices in traditional dress? Or can it never be truly authentic because it replicates a motif from European-American filmmaking?

Those three options were the three main camps people fell into when they were shown the film. As discussed in the previous chapter, Tsumkwe is subject to markers of what is and is not authentic which are often contradictory (see Chapter Four). I argue, that the Ju|'hoansi move between these markers and structures of truth and authenticity nomadically. Rather than being tied down to one particular set of references for what is authentic, they move between them freely.

To illustrate this point more clearly, I want to once again return to the subject of traditional dances. The way dances are performed varies greatly across contexts. During my fieldwork I observed dances which were performed as desperate last attempts to heal sick children after even the hospitals could no longer help. I observed dances in far out villages which were enticed by gifts of tobacco and meat brought to the village by international friends. And finally, I observed dances performed for tourists at the lodge and everything in between.

External factors dramatically change what a dance looks and feels like despite the fact that the songs and choreography remained very similar. In the case of trying to heal individuals, the dances did not start until late at night. The women were wrapped in thick blankets and the healers were dressed head to toe in traditional clothes. Everybody in the village was part of the circle to avoid running into the spirits let loose by the energy of the dance, the fire was small, the atmosphere was tense and the men danced through several trances until they collapsed in the early morning hours from exhaustion.

When dances were done in celebration for friends, such as repeat travellers or researchers who came to the area often, all looked and felt different. Women were wearing colourful jewellery and the dancers kept on their jumpers to keep the cold at bay, the dances started and finished earlier and often some people would choose not to take part and sit by fires close by where they would be protected from the spirits. Yet again different,



at the lodge, men and women were dressed in leather, standing in a half circle around a very large fire.

As the previous chapter showed, there is no coherent way of interpreting which one of these dances is a 'real' San dance. In fact, what makes one version of dance the real dance for some makes it less real for others. For some visitors, it might be the traditional clothes that make the dance authentic and for others they turn it into a "fake puppet show". For some, the wearing of more Western clothes adds authenticity while for others they indicate the loss of true San-ness.

The question is then, which one of these versions (and the ones in between which were not mentioned) is the "true" dance for the San. One Ju|'hoan woman phrased it quite poignantly:

*None of the dances are not real, or not true. All of the dances are real  
[|"hoan"].... Of course the spirits don't come for this [dance for tourists].  
But the spirits often don't come. .... The spirits have nothing to do with  
whether the dance is real.*

This statement expresses most eloquently the sentiment of an answer I received repeatedly. Ju|'hoansi in Tsumkwe, whether they made money with dances for tourists or not, all agreed that while dances were contextualised differently, they were all equally real. As George put it, and as was discussed in the previous chapter, "some people just need some help seeing that it is real". While all their cultural products were equally /'hoan to the San, they helped tourists and researchers along, by giving into their expectations and managing what inputs outsiders could process.

## The Actor

So how can we think about this way of accepting contradictory interpretations as simultaneously true? A common way of reading this data for people I discussed this with in Tsumkwe, is that the San are "just acting", that they are merely performing what the tourists or researchers or NGOs want to see.

Goffman's performance theory (1956) posits that an individual has several onstage persona's, but also offstage personas. Onstage personas are thought to be less authentic

than off-stage personas. Many non-San in Tsumkwe, that is researchers, tourists, travellers, consider “mere” performance as the antithesis to authenticity. The notion of performance, it seems, carries with it the threat of empty superficiality.

*I mean, whether it's authentic depends on whether they [the San] are being themselves, or whether they are just playing a character*

Even in discussing the previous chapter with members of my PhD cohort, I was asked whether I was not diminishing the San by comparing them to a filmset. While on fieldwork, I was frequently criticised for offering filmmaking workshop, with one email arguing that films would “kill the culture of these innocent Stone Age children”. The notion of performance, of film and ‘characters’, it seems, is often seen to threaten the imagined purity of authenticity.

I believe the notion of performance is an extremely useful one when thinking about Tsumkwe. However, it can only be useful if it can be taken beyond a ‘true self’/performance dichotomy. To illustrate this, I will briefly turn my attention back to the set of Vikings where performance and actors can be observed more explicitly.

One thing that stood out at the film set was the way in which everybody involved in the making of the set, but specifically the actors, accommodated the characters of the story in their operational values and reasoning on the set; that is to say, characters were treated like people.

On the first day of the set I was taking a taxi back to Dublin when I was joined by an actor who had been playing one of the fanbase’s favourite characters until he died in the previous season. Taken by surprise, when he got into the car I rather oafishly exclaimed: “Oh, I thought you were dead!” As he looked at the screenplay in my lap he seemed to deduce that since I had a restricted version of the screenplay he might as well share information: “well, it seems now I am some sort of ghost”.

We spent the rest of the 45 minute taxi ride comparing our different lines of work and finding more similarities than differences. However, what struck me most about the way he spoke about the show was how he was referring to his character. “I miss being Athelstan” he said. This was consistent with the way others referred to characters throughout my time there. I never heard any of the actors talking about their activity on

the set as “playing” a character. Rather, they saw themselves as ‘being the character’ and talked about them not as figments of the creator’s imagination but as real people.

To be clear, I do not mean to argue here that actors were subject to delusions or merged with their character so much that they could no longer tell where their own self ended and the character began. In the car, George said he also missed Judith. Jenny, the woman who portrayed Judith, George’s character’s love interest, was also in the car: “Awwwwww, Georgie, I miss you too”. Teasing, he corrected her:

*No, not you. You are a crazy piece of work... But I miss the whole thing  
between Athelstan and Judith*

He explained that Jenny was of course his friend but what he missed most was Athelstan being in love with her. He was quick to explain that this did not mean that he was in love with Jenny or Judith – he was in fact very happily otherwise liaised. However, his love for his partner did not detract from Athelstan’s love for Judith and it was this love that he missed facilitating.

This detachment between actors and characters is crucial to grasp the degree of autonomy characters are awarded in this context. This autonomy starts at the writer’s desk. As Michael Hirst explained, he does not think of his job as making up stories for the characters. “I start with an empty space”, he says. Then, the characters come to visit and inhabit the scene. When he sits down at his desk to write an episode, he has no clear, strict plan in mind. Rather, he waits for the characters to appear and tell him what they have been up to.

However, this process, he admits, is not perfect and not unique to only his relationship with the characters. Outside of his office, actions of characters can be contested. It is not unusual for actors to argue for a character behaving differently than is laid out in the script. The actors then approach Michael and make their case as to why they think a certain character should behave differently based on the character’s personality. In the end, it is Michael who makes the ultimate decision as to how the scene will play out but more often than not he is open to being persuaded.

The script is one of the most powerful artefacts at the set. Obtaining a script is very difficult and only people with extended rights are allowed to look at it before the scene is shot. It is the very core of all activity. Not unlike a religious text in a language only

accessibly to the religious elites, the heads of department interpret the scripts for their underlings and pass on the information they deem necessary while protecting what might be sensitive information. What is in the script will be made possible one way or another. The only thing that can impact the script – apart from acts of god – is the integrity of the characters. While monetary or logistical concerns would almost never successfully change the script, a good argument as to what a fictional character would or would not do, can. In fact, characters are not treated as fictional in this context but rather as concrete entities with limited options to explain themselves.

Still, characters change and develop. However, this is the product of what some of the actors describe as psychoanalysis of a silent patient. Since the characters have no direct voice, it is through analysing their previous actions and inferred motivations that these developments and changes are driven. As Linus, one of the actors, tells me, he frequently writes Michael emails with titles like ‘revelation: ‘King Egbert DOES love Judith’ late at night when he finally understands some of the things the character who occasionally inhabits him does. From this, conversations and ultimately plot shifts emerge.

While performing, the actors understand the characters to inhabit them. However, this is not to say that in the bodily space of the actor, the actor ceases to exist and is replaced by the character. Rather, as several actors explained to me, the responsibility of the actor is to open themselves up to the world that is created around them and allow the characters to ‘flow’ through them.

The connection between Tsumkwe and characters on the film set might at first seem tedious. But if we take the understanding that actors have of performance, namely that characters are not empty figments of the imagination but rather entities with integrity, we can begin to conceptualise the way in which the Ju|’hoansi take seriously seemingly contradictory interpretation of San-ness. Like George can appreciate and feel the love of Athelstan for Judith while being unproblematically in love with his own partner, the Ju|’hoansi can experience both a dance for tourists and dance for researchers as equally true.

## The Trickster

Performance is an important part of San storytelling (as discussed in Chapter Four). It is the canon of San stories and cosmology which offers yet another way to shed light on how contradiction is navigated. Consider the following story which, while not around a fire but instead on the side of the road while waiting for someone to pick us up, was told to me in the typical fashion of evocative gestures and voices:

*The Kori Bustard and the Turtle were friends. But the turtle was always complaining to the Kori Buster: You say you are my friend but you would eat me if you had the chance! The Kori Buster was very offended and replied: I would never eat a friend! And besides, you have such an unappetising, wrinkly neck! I could never eat someone with such a disgusting neck! So, the turtle decided to set a trap for the Kori Buster. The next time they agreed to meet, the Turtle put a pot on his fire and jumped in to cook himself. When the Kori Buster came to visit he could not see the turtle, just a pot boiling on the fire with meat that was smelling delicious. So he was shouting out: "Turtle, where are you? Hello? There is some delicious meat here!" When the turtle did not come, he decided to eat what was in the pot. When he had finished, the turtle said: Ha! I knew you would eat me!*

*The Kori Buster was very surprised and a little bit annoyed that the turtle would pull a prank on him like that. So the next time the turtle was supposed to visit him he did the same thing. He put a pot on his fire and boiled himself. When the turtle came, he just saw meat cooking on the fire. He called for the Kori Buster and no one answered. So he waited and waited. Finally, the Kori Buster jumped out of the pot and said: Why did you not eat me? To which the turtle replied: I'm a vegetarian.*

For my argument, the most important aspect of this story is the state of the turtle. Even though he has cooked himself and been eaten by the Kori Buster, he continues to be alive. Importantly, the move from the turtle having been eaten and the turtle talking is not qualified by explaining that the turtle miraculously came to life or climbed back out of the

Kori Bustards throat. It is at this point, that non-Ju|'hoan audiences often ask for clarification. To most audiences, this just does not seem to make sense. One of my friends explained his confusion like this:

*I get that the animals can talk. That is fine. Clearly this is some kind of world where animals speak and have houses and pots and build fires. But if the turtle is dead one moment and clearly alive the next, I need some sort of explanation for the story to make sense.*

San scholars such as Lorna Marshall (1970), Megan Biesle (1993), George Silberbauer (1965) and Robert Guenther (2002) have written about the fragmented and ambiguous nature of San belief. This fragmentation and ambiguity, Guenther argues, is indicative of a “culture whose universe is less dualistically structured (2002:15) than those of the anthropologists trying to make sense of it”.

This flexibility brings us back to the subject of nomadism. In fact, Barnard argues that this fluidity in belief augments their social flexibility and enables frameworks of fluid patterns of settlement and seasonal migration to persist (Cashdan, et al., 1983, p. 55).

Perhaps the most useful example for this fluidity is the way in which Guenther writes about the “Bushman-Trickster”. The Trickster is a central feature in San mythology and belief. Going by different names, he is a deity secondary to the more detached ‘creator-god’. While exact myths differ widely according to region and language group, the Trickster occupies a conceptually ambiguous, flexible and often openly contradictory space. Guenther (2002:16) identifies three dimensions of his being through which his ambiguity surfaces: “ontologically, temporally and morally”. Unfazed by contradictions, he can be human and animal at the same time, simultaneously be spirit and flesh and move between dreams and the real world. Just as unproblematically, the Trickster defies temporal conventions and can travel back and forth through time. Guenther concludes:

In sum, we see the Bushman Trickster to be a highly complex and enigmatic figure [...] who confounds within him every conceivable category and all conceptual boundaries, shuttling the borders between the mythological past and the here and now. (2002: 12)

The Trickster as a representative of San ideology is perfectly equipped to travel outside and inside history and across different archives of thought. If the Trickster can be human

and animal at the same time, and a turtle can be dead and alive simultaneously, then the Ju|'hoansi can inhabit contradictory models of San-ness without being disingenuous.

Whether we think of it as Nomadism, performance or 'Trickstering', these models can help us understand how a space such as the pre-archive, with openly incommensurable or compartmentalised truths can be inhabited.

## MASTERY

Whether we use the model of the Nomad, the Actor, the Trickster, or a composite of the three to think about how the Ju|'hoansi and artists at the *Vikings* film set inhabit the pre-archival space, they move fluidly between the images which are provided by tourists, NGOs, and researchers. This fluidity is used to accommodate and cater to interpretations which outsiders bring with them, or it can be used to exist in multiple realities simultaneously. But markers of authenticity, boundaries of images, while in some instances carefully negotiated, can also be broken down and experimented with.

On a walk through the *Viking* set with the costume designer I was shown a piece of art she had been working on recently and was particularly proud of: A wedding dress, designed for the marriage of a French princess to one of the Vikings. The dress, rather than based on what is believed to be known of the period's fashion, was white, low cut and included decorative elements which would have been impossible to produce in the 8th century.

Joan Bergin, who is one of the UK's most esteemed costume designers, and has won three Emmys on TV series *Tudors* alone, had this to say about the dress:

*It [the dress] does not look like it belongs into the period. But it is stunning.  
I feel by now we have shown that we can do Vikings; now we can experiment  
and have a little fun.*

This informant's professional status and her implication that one has to be able to master the convention before it can be broken, suggests that being a Trickster might require a certain level of skill and/or confidence. At the film set, certainly, artists experience the balance between creativity and authenticity as extremely precarious. This was evident because of frequent remarks about authenticity and whether creative choices might lead to criticism. On average, people on the set were most concerned with replicating existing

ideas and working off the script within predefined notions of what would be acceptable. Some individuals, however, such as Joan Bergin, consistently played with those rules and broke them down, a notion which will become important again in Chapter Seven. This included the shows creator, who would consciously include contemporary elements such as the T.S. Eliot poem cited in the previous chapter, but also much lower ranking individuals.

“I started at the bottom of the pile last year” one of the many members of the makeup department tells me. “But now the only person above me is Tom and he is starting to let me do more and more challenging stuff. I get to work with the main characters. It’s great” Her reply when I ask her what the reason for her success is:

*I know when to take risks.... I hope I do anyway! Like, when to push a look further or when to understate.*

In Tsumkwe, many Ju|’hoansi confirm outsiders’ notions of San-ness (and in this way their reality of Nyae Nyae). Some, however, productively subvert, break down and merge those realities – Like K|ao, whose continuous commercial endeavours constantly put him on the verge of not being San enough for amassing money and seeking to improve his status; or Elizabeth who wears modern Namibian clothes, works as a secretary for one of the NGOs and still manages to maintain a traditional life style where she is learning traditional healing dances; or Sam who is forever fusing and innovating dances and songs, performs for tourists, heals, and has won trans-African dance competitions.

Many Tricksters act as gatekeepers for outside visitors. Perhaps the most impressive mastery of the fluid balancing act between subversion and reconstitution of multiple truths was displayed by Joel. Despite no official affiliation with any tourism establishment or organisation, Joel was involved in more ongoing projects and had more international contacts than anybody else.

As a translator/interlocutor/tourist guide he worked for several individuals who visited the area repeatedly. Those travellers, based on what Joel told me and based on having met three of them, seemed to all have a particularly strong personal connection to San culture and the Kalahari, preferring to spend their time in the villages rather than visiting Tsumkwe and priding themselves in the personal relationships they had established with Joel and other Ju|’hoansi. Joel not only kept those travellers separate from each other, he



also actively went out of his way to prevent them from finding out about each other. This sometimes became stressful when more than one – or sometimes even two – of those clients were in Nyae Nyae. However, he managed those situations well enough to keep his friends/clients committed to him – much like his ongoing romantic adventures, some of which had produced offspring, somehow did not negatively impact his marriage.

With the same unproblematic ease with which Joel kept different spheres apart, he was able to bring people together for creative projects and make things happen. This was evident in his making of the film I discussed above, both in making it happen in the first place and in the way in which the film exists on different registers of being San simultaneously.

Not every San in Tsumkwe is a trickster, but in this pre-archival space, Tricksters thrive. It is Tricksters who manage to bring together their own San-ness with the expectations of tourists and manage to provide authentic experiences. It is Tricksters who make connections with researchers and increase their chance of employment in the future. It is Tricksters who act as translators and interlocutors for NGOs.

## Conclusion

I want to briefly discuss two caveats with regards to this model. First, it is important to consider the possibility that the Trickster seems to be so prominent in Tsumkwe as a result of a history of oppression. Through much of the 20th century, the San were persecuted and oppressed by both Black and White Namibians. It is quite possible that the Trickster is the only response to dealing with those oppressions that has ‘survived’, and hence a self-selected social phenomenon. James Suzman makes a similar argument in a recent blog post. In a similar way, only the Nomadic might have made it to Tsumkwe from across Namibia. This is not to suggest that the socioeconomic stresses directly caused Nomadism or Tricksterism, as an extreme revisionist might argue, but rather that they might have been socio-economically encouraged.

Second, discussing subjects such as the Trickster, nomadism and performance often overemphasizes false dualisms. The ability to traverse boundaries of structured realities in the process of cultural production is, as this chapter shows, not unique to the Ju|’hoansi. Neither do I mean to argue that it is unique to what I labelled pre-archival spaces.

Furthermore, to be a Nomad, a Trickster or an actor does not automatically grant total control over the pre-archival space. Rather, it simply means to move more freely between multiple images and being less constricted by any hegemonic truth. The Pre-Archive is both upheld by the Trickster – otherwise it would ultimately be hegemonised – and lets those who are able to move freely within it flourish.

The comparison of Tsumkwe with a film set over the last two chapters had three main purposes. Firstly, as a contained environment which is perhaps more easily relatable to non-San readers, the film set serves as a framework for an ethnographic context in Tsumkwe which is highly complex and contains tensions which, in isolation, are difficult to flesh out.

Secondly, the comparison removes the analysis from an academic context which is otherwise focussed on the San alone and can run the risk of considering them an exotic, isolated entity which is not part of global identity politics.

Thirdly, at first sight, Tsumkwe and the set of Vikings seem to occupy opposite ends of the imagined traditional/modern or authentic/fake scale. Showing how similar the two are both serves to dispel simplified notions of these places and begins to break down the divide between ‘authentic’ and ‘fake’. In both places these terms are shown to be merely artificial labels which help situate the self in complex dynamics of the imagination.

We might therefore conclude that when Komtsa argues that what I describe of the production of *Vikings* is like the Ju|’hoansi he means this:

**Like the creators of Vikings, the Ju|’hoansi occupy a space which is dominated by various and sometimes incommensurable preconceived expectations regarding their cultural identity and this space has to be manoevered carefully and fluidly in order to create successful cultural products.**

Since coming to this conclusion I have since asked Komtsa if this was what he meant. He said it was, however, there is scope here to argue that after I just spent a whole chapter talking about how epistemologically flexible the Ju|’hoansi are, Komtsa agreeing with me is not as easily translatable an information as I would like it to be.



## 6. INSIDE

While the last chapter looked at how we might conceptualise ways in which the pre-archival space may be inhabited successfully, this chapter argues that many outsiders fail to adapt to the ‘rules’ of Tsumkwe and are cast out as a result. Having shown in the preceding chapter how images form the basis for negotiations of identity and the traversing of multiplicity, this chapter explores the social interactions between Ju|’hoansi and non-San against the previously established background.

The title “Inside” does not refer to any notion of being ‘inside indigeneity’ versus outside, or a traditional/modern, authentic/inauthentic divide. Rather, the ‘Inside’ I speak of is Tsumkwe as a fluid space of identity construction, dominated by dynamics of egalitarianism.

I begin by looking at what it is that draws NGOs and other projects to Tsumkwe. Like tourists, NGO workers and other individuals who come to Tsumkwe to help the San have personal motivations and backgrounds. While this chapter will argue how external involvement in Nyae Nyae is constrained by San sociality, it is important to point out that many projects and NGOs are motivated to ‘help’ Tsumkwe precisely because of its San identity. Francis argues, convincingly, that the San are disadvantaged by the constrictions of their image by external forces (Francis & Francis, 2010). As I will show in this chapter, there are varied and subtle difficulties for NGOs trying to establish a presence in Tsumkwe. Here, the extent to which NGOs can dominate Tsumkwe and San identity is constrained by San sociality.

Again like tourists, NGOs bring with them their own ideas of who the San are and their own ways of sense making. In the initial stages of projects being established, the Ju|’hoansi typically confirm those views, similarly to how they confirm the views of the tourists (see previous chapter).

Typically, NGOs – or rather the people employed by them – find Tsumkwe to be a frustrating place in the long run because of what some perceive as a lack of consistency in response to developmental efforts. Some individuals, however, develop coping mechanisms and adapt.

I then provide an ethnographic account of the Annual General meeting of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy. The events at the AGM illustrate both the way in which organisations typically present themselves to the Nyae Nyae community and highlights inter-NGO hostility.

Both the hostility and typical failure to establish themselves, I argue, is partly due to a sense of competition between the NGOs. Further, however, NGOs are often unable to navigate Tsumkwe nomadically in the same way as the Ju|'hoansi.

I argue that Ju|'hoan egalitarianism and its levelling techniques play an important role in preventing NGOs from becoming 'too successful'. I am uncertain as to whether these techniques are applied on purpose or subconsciously, but the data clearly shows that NGOs are driven out of Tsumkwe by frustration over non-participation in their projects.

## TUCSIN, Matthias, and the Garden

Like many indigenous groups worldwide, the San have had to face many challenges in fighting for and protecting their rights (see Chapter Two but also Biesele & Hitchcock, 2013). According to Megan Biesele, "the responses of the Ju|'hoansi to these daunting challenges makes a fascinating and encouraging story." (2003, p. 79)

I am inclined to agree with her. By measures of land rights, hunting rights, self governance, and education, the San living in the Nyae Nyae conservancy have been much more successful than other San in Namibia and many indigenous groups internationally. The Ju|'hoansi have the right to gather, hunt traditionally, farm and sell licenses for trophy hunting. There are regulations (however imperfect in practice) which mean that filmmakers, researchers and tourists in Nyae Nyae all have to pay into a pot which is shared annually among all the people of the conservancy. There are plenty of opportunities to make money from tourists. Schooling is available in Ju|'hoan. Finally, and this is the focus of this chapter, a seemingly never-ending flow NGOs and individuals offers support in a variety of ways.

While some organisations manage to establish a permanent presence, most outsiders (that is NGOs, governmental organisations, and individuals) who want to in some way 'help' the San only manage to pass through fleetingly before they either give up or leave for some other reason. Of 17 budding outside projects which were happening when I

started fieldwork, only 5 were still active when I left but had been joined by another 14. According to one informant, projects stayed typically a year before leaving. Admittedly, some projects only have funding for one year. The organisations and private projects I observed, however, all (except one) had initially much longer term goals.

This raises two questions. Firstly, how has Tsumkwe maintained its stable presence as a place of San-ness despite this constant flux of outside influence – and secondly, why are so many outsiders drawn in but very often ultimately repelled? To answer these questions, this chapter will look at how helper's 'realities' can be seen to be in conflict with one another. I argue, however, that rather than there being a mere competition between NGOs, it is ultimately the dynamics of egalitarianism which allows external realities in to Tsumkwe, but in most cases eventually casts them out if they do not adapt.

#### DRAWING THEM IN

In Chapter Three, I discussed reasons why people are attracted to Tsumkwe – be it through romanticised notions of a better way of being human, fascination with what is thought of as the primitive, or search for their own roots. While so far tourists have been the focus of those observations, the same is true for the people who work for and direct NGOs.

“To understand TUCSIN”, a high-ranking Namibian government official who elected to remain anonymous told me,

*you have to understand Apartheid and independence. Suddenly we had equality and freedom of movement - socially and geographically - but our young black people were struggling to make it through university.*

He went on to explain that TUCSIN excelled at helping Black people who are already at least somewhat on their path to tertiary education make it through university successfully. TUCSIN has produced black dentists, surgeons and scientists all across Namibia who now support the organisation generously so they can extend the help they received towards more young Black people on the verge of moving up in the world. “In other words”, my informant said, “TUCSIN are good at helping those who are juuuuust outside the system of power INTO the system of power”

Just as I started my fieldwork, TUCSIN decided to try their hand at something new. Shifting away from what had until then been an exclusive focus on university education, they bought Tsumkwe Lodge to build a multi-purpose educational centre for the San. The idea was (or is) to offer vocational training, classes in jewellery making and English classes to kick-start the economy in Tsumkwe and “help the San help themselves”, as a TUCSIN representative tells me. While TUCSIN is based in Windhoek, however, they soon realised that they would need someone on the ground to look after the operations on a day to day basis.

The task of moving to Tsumkwe permanently did not appeal to any of the Windhoek based board members, so they contracted another organisation, based in Switzerland, to provide them with development workers.

This is how the Trappe family came to Tsumkwe. It was Matthias and Renee’s family’s first time on the continent of Africa. Both were trained stage actors and had previously run an acting school in Basel. Matthias had studied Geography and education 20 years ago. The two of them decided that it was time for a change and an adventure abroad. After all, their oldest son was four years old - soon he would be tied into the Swiss educational system and being abroad would become much more difficult. So, Matthias applied for the job as TUCSIN’s man on the ground and brought his family.

In order to set up my argument for this chapter I want to consider the personal motivations for ‘outsiders’ coming to Tsumkwe. When I speak of NGOs or outsiders in this chapter, I am referring to individuals who have come to Tsumkwe with the intention of helping the San. These people may or may not be part of larger organisations, they come from a variety of countries (Though largely Europe, the US and South Africa) and a variety of backgrounds. What connects them is that they are all there as a result of a choice they made. They are, in some shape or form, in Tsumkwe because of the San – much like George explained to Eliza in Chapter Three.

Speaking of Finnish aid workers, Liisa Malkki argues

that it is not as generic ‘global citizens’, ‘worldly nomads’, or ‘cosmopolitans’ but as specific social persons with homegrown needs, vulnerabilities, desires and multiple professional responsibilities that people sought to be part of something

greater than themselves, to help, to be actors in the lively world. (Malkki, 2015, p. 4)

Judging from the conversation with various NGO workers and people in Tsumkwe who wanted to 'help', I believe that this focus on individual background is equally as important in a place like this as in emergency aid contexts, if not more so. The choice to come to Tsumkwe, rather than to a different place, to do development work was always driven by complex personal motivations rather than objective need.

For the Trappe family, it was a zest for adventure that made them decide to apply for TUCSIN's post. This post itself was only available because of TUCSIN. However, the organisation, at the time of my fieldwork one of the biggest NGO players in Tsumkwe, was there as a result of personal, individual preference, too: It was the lady quoted in Chapter Two (asking me why the San were so resistant to education) who had used her influence to convince TUCSIN to buy the lodge.

Consistently, outside 'helpers' had particular, deeply personal feelings about the San which had motivated them to focus their efforts on Tsumkwe.

Sheila, for instance was a recovering heroin addict in South Africa when one night she woke up, having been told in her dream that God wanted her to go to Tsumkwe. At this point in time, Sheila had never heard of Tsumkwe before but through a story of trials and tribulations finally found it. Morbidly obese and without a car, she set out to build a school for disabled children – manually and brick by brick with only her eight dogs as a support network.

The story of Karl was similarly inspired by a dream. As a self-identified philanthropist on a journey to find himself, he had followed the inspiration of his mother. His mother, he told me could "sense information others could not" and she, a Canadian who had never been to Namibia, had dreamt of a plant that existed only in the Kalahari. This was enough reason for him to come and visit, and it was Tsumkwe where he got stuck. "These people are very special and I just know that I have a job to do here" he said. It should be clarified that a google search of Karl revealed that he was in fact awaiting trial in Canada – he was being sued for 43 million Canadian Dollars for a telemarketing scam.

Yet another colourful example is Aleks, the woman first mentioned in Chapter Two who tried to buy Nhoma to turn it into a self-help development project (at least so the narrative goes). Disillusioned with the superficiality of her super model career she went



travelling in order to, like Karl, find herself. Like Karl, she found herself in the same place where she found the San – her longing for a deeper connection with mother nature finally fulfilled.

Those three examples may be somewhat extreme or bizarre. However, they echo a common trend around personal backgrounds and journeys. In the vast majority of cases, the major motivators in people's narratives of how they got to Tsumkwe included either dreams, a message from God, a search for the self, a longing for adventure or a combination of all the above.

An interesting question to look further into, might be the precise nature of the spiritual reasons people provided. At least with the three stories above (and generally in many more), redemption, or compensation of a perceived vice seems to be a recurring theme: Sheila moved away from her heroine addiction, Karl from his multi million dollar law suit, and Aleks from a superficial and hostile industry.

In *The need to help* (2015), Malkki speaks of the 'neediness' of aid workers. This helps us understand that NGO workers and others who come to help the San are driven by the same biases and motivations as, for example tourists whose essentialising gaze is criticised much more often than that of development workers. Understanding the part of what brings outsiders to Tsumkwe as a need to help – in order, for instance to redeem or find oneself - does two important things for the argument of this chapter.

Firstly, it helps shed light on why people are particularly attracted to Tsumkwe rather than other places or impoverished areas. Malkki argues that aid workers often find it easier to help those who are far away, removed from their own lived reality. Who then, could be more removed than a San 'Bushman' who in the development worker's imagination - as much as in the tourist's imagination- is removed from them not only geographically but also occupies a different realm of reality. In Chapter Three I argued that part of the appeal of San is their imagined connection to the Stone Age – the sweet spot between the sphere of myths and 'history proper'. Aid workers may well imagine the San to not only be geographically but also temporally removed.

Secondly, it is significant that this neediness is rooted in a particular imagination of the world. It is a particular imagination of the world that motivates outsiders to come to Tsumkwe. In chapter Three I argued that outsiders bring with them their own realities and understandings of San identity. Here, I want to specify that NGO workers bring not

only preconceived notions of the San but also how the world works – or should work – in relation to them.

The first time I saw the Trappe family, their arrival was being filmed for Swiss TV. “We are not here to save the San” was the Trappe’s somewhat confusing motto. They felt very strongly, that it was not their job to tell the San how to develop but rather to put their skills, experience and TUCSIN’s resources at their disposal to offer the San the chance to make their own fortune. Matthias and Renee had brought with them a very particular vision of how development should work. This vision was intimately connected with what it meant to be Swiss. Using Switzerland as a reference point for orderliness, efficiency and reasonable behaviour, Matthias would often make clear his surprise and indignation at how things were run in Tsumkwe.

*“In Switzerland he would be fired by now”*

*“This would never happen in Switzerland”*

*“These buildings would never be approved in Switzerland”*

Their attitude towards the San, similarly, was inspired by Swiss ideas of equality, responsibility and hard work. If the San only were treated like everybody else, with respect, and given opportunities to improve themselves, they would surely thrive to improve their lot, the Trappes reasoned. Their own role, in their opinion was to provide what the San might need for self-motivated, dignified progress.

It might be obvious but bears pointing out that NGO workers had their own ideas of how the world worked which they expected the San to fit into. Often, these ideas were based vaguely on national or religious identities. In those worlds, the San were often thought to be lacking or to have been left behind, in need of their expertly assistance.

Stefanie, for example, a German nurse who worked for a project supporting Tsumkwe Clinic, believed, similar to the Trappe family, that German efficiency and order would help the San “who are rotting away in chaos”(translated) to catch up with the rest of the developed world.

Other individuals, however, came to Tsumkwe with what initially might have looked like openness. People like Aleks, Daniela (Chapter Five) or Karl claimed that it was them

who were learning from the San. In fact, however, all three had arrived in Tsumkwe with previous spiritual ideas about what they called ‘Mother Nature’. While they felt their spirituality confirmed in Tsumkwe, the categories through which they were experiencing this, however, were entirely their own.

“Mother Nature”, for instance, in the way that those three outsiders understood it, is not a concept that is part of Ju|’hoan epistemology. While people had very positive relationships with the land, they did not think of it as a female, mystical, quasi-entity endowed with magical qualities (as did Aleks, Karl and Daniela).

Interestingly, actual Ju|’hoan notions of spirituality, such as N|um, the decidedly neutral but powerful energy that flows through some individual people, kinds of animals and songs were not picked up on by those who claimed the San as their spiritual teachers.

The point I seek to make here is this: Whether outsider’s worldviews saw the San as lagging behind or spiritually advanced, they were still based on their own images of the world and interpretation of what Tsumkwe is or should be.

I also wish to clarify here that I do not mean to vilify all NGO workers or engaged individuals in Tsumkwe simply for not being free of normal biases. NGO and aid workers work very hard in Tsumkwe and their overall presence doubtlessly contributes to Nyae Nyae’s relative success.

The Trappe family and I soon became friends and would discuss our experience of Tsumkwe over wine at the Lodge. During one of our first conversations, Matthias told me of TUCSIN’s plan to offer gardening classes and a plot for gardening at the lodge: “It’s going to be great. They can eat some of it and whatever is left over they can sell.” It felt awkward to tell him that even I, in my limited knowledge of Tsumkwe knew of at least three other projects like this that had launched in the past ten years. Garden projects were running on repeat in Tsumkwe. According to ‘old-timers’ like Arno and Andre, the gardens would almost certainly only last as long as the outside instigator was still in Tsumkwe looking after it. Another problem, according to them, was that San people simply did not enjoy some of the vegetables that would typically be planted. A third problem, which emerged with the TUCSIN garden even before it had started to be planted was the question of who gets to eat the vegetables and who gets to sell them on for profit (never mind the question of who would buy them and with what money).

As George confirmed, Tsumkwe would go through a gardening project roughly every other year. I wondered again at this point why development efforts in Tsumkwe seemed to be so perpetually uncoordinated. Did the people who thought they had come up with a novel idea of teaching San how to garden never find out about their predecessors? Or did they just continue nonetheless? Why did the San go along with it? Why did they not tell them what had gone wrong the previous time?

## SOME STICK IT OUT

“In three months I’m going to quit for sure” Andre says. “That’s what you said half a year ago” I reply.

*But this time I mean it. They can shove their money where the sun doesn't shine. I've had enough, I'm too old for this crap.*

Andre is the engineer looking after the Tsumkwe solar power station. As the face, mind and body of electricity in Tsumkwe he has a difficult role to play. When the power is out, due to defective parts which take several days to be replaced - something that happens relatively often - he gets blamed. When the power is out in the evening and people are drunk, the hostility towards him gets particularly vicious. “I hope you die, Andre!” One woman shouted at him during a blackout only to apologise the next day when she had sobered up.

Andre has been doing his job in solitude for twelve years. The power plant is a giant masterpiece of German engineering. It is fine-tuned to him and he to the plant. Once, during a braai he suddenly froze and asked “Do you hear this?” “No...” we replied. “Exactly!” he exclaimed! “Why is my generator not turning on?” Putting down his third double rum and coke of the evening, he jumped on his quad bike and raced to the power plant to prevent a power outage.

Electricity in Tsumkwe without Andre seems impossible. It is not only the power plant but also the population of Tsumkwe that he is fine-tuned to. Constantly, people ring him to connect them illegally to the power network. Constantly, they ring him for electricity cards when the shops are closed. While Andre complains day in and day out, ultimately,

he always helps. “His heart is too big.” Komtsa says one day. “He lets people use him but he just can’t not help them.”

This seems to map Andre’s experience. Often, people steal from him. Even more often, they exploit his generosity. I ask Andre one day why he came to Tsumkwe. “The pay was good. And I wanted to get away from my ex-wife.” he says. “It still is good. But if I could I would leave.” But Andre is one of the few ones who stay and stick it out. Most organisations come and go, most projects end after a year or two, hardly anybody manages to establish a permanent residency in Tsumkwe. “One year is not a lot here” Joel says one day. “Maybe seven or eight. But not one”.

Another outsider who has been sticking it out in Tsumkwe for a very long time is Dave. His job is to develop schooling for San children. By his own admission, his project is largely ineffective. Schools don’t seem to work, teachers are demotivated, San children are taken out of school early. Still, Dave remains. There might not be much he can do, he argues, but what he can do is help those children who are not going to school because of lack of transportation. Thus, Dave spends most of his day driving San children and teachers from point A to point B - “I’m a glorified taxi driver” he says ambiguously.

It is people like Andre, Dave, and the manager of Tsumkwe Country Lodge (who has dedicated her life to saving animals) who manage to stay a long time. By coincidence or design they have developed strategies to deal with what others have not been able to cope with.

Dave is in constant psychosomatic pain, The lodge manager locks herself in isolation with her cats and Andre drinks vast quantities of alcohol and smokes about 60 cigarettes a day. Those are the ways in which they handle the biggest of Tsumkwe’s dangers: frustration. In an effort to track people down who had left Tsumkwe and asking those who witnessed them leaving I started making enquiries. In the end, most of the reasons for leaving sounded remarkably similar. One quote sums it up particularly well:

*I just could not take it anymore. I feel really deeply about [their project] and in the beginning it seemed to be working. But it was like a constant fight against an invisible enemy. Everything would take so long. People would agree to something and it would never happen, the people seemed to be just going through the motions. (NGO worker)*

*It's like this place paralyses you. Time works differently here. When you start something, everything can happen really fast, but then in the end, nothing comes of it. (NGO worker)*

*Tsumkwe is a strange place. Events can explode one day, and it can seem like things are happening but in some ways, nothing is changing. It's still the same Tsumkwe it was 20 years ago, only with smartphones. (individual philanthropist)*

*It was just too much. Or rather, too little. In the beginning, everything was great... but then... You can only fail so many times before you think 'Oh well, Fuck it' (former NGO director)*

The above examples are just a small collection but they illustrate an undeniable trend. People come to Tsumkwe with a mission, initially thinking that what they are doing is successful but ultimately leaving in frustration.

The Swiss family left Tsumkwe shortly after I did, terminating their contract two years early. "It's pointless" Matthias said. "There is nothing we can do here". They had felt that they were not supported by TUCSIN enough throughout their stay. The conversion of two of the guest bungalows into their house had taken an entire year. The building works on their educational centre were supposed to have started months ago, training up indigenous bricklayers in the process. However, the lack of support from TUCSIN was only the lesser of two problems. More importantly, they felt that they had nothing to contribute to Tsumkwe.

*According to TUCSIN's plans we should have trained 15 brick layers by now. But who needs brick layers in Tsumkwe? Much less 15 of them in a place with a negligible demand for stone houses! (Matthias)*

While the traditional authority had welcomed them when they arrived and seemed to be agreeable with their ideas and plans, it turned out that the San had not taken much to their initiatives, beyond a level of minimal engagement. This, they decided was just much too frustrating to give up their lives in Switzerland for.

## ONE YEAR PRIOR: THE AGM MEETING

In order to start making sense of this trend, I want to begin with an ethnographic account from the initial stages of the Trappe family's stay.

One year before their decision to leave, I was having breakfast with Eliza next to our campsite when Matthias found us. "Hey, did you know that the AGM was today?" he asked. "What," I replied. "I thought it was meant to be next week."

*Well, apparently not. I just heard from Boyscout.*

Matthias was understandable angry. The traditional authority and the foundation had told him several times how important it was for him to come to the AGM meeting to present himself and to demonstrate clearly that the lodge, rather than a separate entity until now, was now fully intending to contribute to the benefit of Tsumkwe, the conservancy and the San in general. In hushed voices, he had been told about how Arno used to exploit the San and how the lodge had never cooperated with the conservancy or the foundation.

The AGM was a meeting of stakeholders in Tsumkwe, led by the Nyae Nyae foundation to discuss any relevant business and to introduce new projects. delegates from each village, the conservancy council, and the traditional authority would be present along with some external stakeholders from the government and other organisations.

After being told how important his appearance was, Matthias had prepared a presentation, just as Eliza, Joel and I had prepared a presentation for CEDU which we were eager to give. Now we had been told that the date of the AGM had been moved. That we were not informed was not overly surprising. However, not inviting Matthias after impressing upon him how important his attendance was, seemed odd. We decided to just drive to the meeting and see if they could not fit our presentations in spontaneously.

I made a few phone calls to find out where the AGM meeting was being held. While I was unable to find out for sure, Boyscout told us that it was normally held at a meeting place just 20 km outside of Tsumkwe on the C44. Mathias and his family, including his two young children went in the Trappe's car while Eliza and I went ahead in ours. When we got to the place, all we found was a handful of !Kung sitting around a fire and drinking tea.

Eliza jumped out of the car to make enquiries and was back quickly. The men had told her the AGM had been held here for the last 10 years. But this year it was in Klein Dobe. “They don’t know why” Eliza shrugged.

Looking at my map I realised that it would take us an hour and a half at least to drive to this new location. However, we were all determined to make it to the meeting. After driving through the bush for about 30 minutes we were met by Dave in his car. Like us, he had been surprised by the change of venue. Not realizing how far the village was, he decided to turn back in order to avoid running out of Diesel. Fortunately, we carried 80 emergency litres of diesel and were able to help him out and continued in a caravan of now three cars.

When we arrived in Klein Dobe, Dave quickly detached himself from our group and went to find some old acquaintances. Before Mathias, Renee, their two children, Eliza and I could even approach the meeting, the official from The Nyae Nyae foundation, Dorothy was marching towards us with open arms.

I’m so glad that you made it!

“Yes,” Matthias replied. “It was a little bit difficult. Nobody told us that the date and the location had been changed.” Dorothy smiled. “Well, now you are here”

After plans were made when we could fit in our presentations and Dorothy reiterated once again how important it was for the lodge to demonstrate a will to cooperate, Dorothy went back to her post. Mathias turned around to me:

*Wow was she pissed to see us.*

Before I continue the account of this meeting, several things are important to note. In the end, it was the lack of cooperation from existing NGOs, especially the Nyae Nyae foundation as much as the lack of support from TUCSIN and the lacklustre engagement of the San population that drove the Trappe family away. Further, it is important to note that this secrecy, antagonism (whether from Matthias or Dorothy), and lack of cooperation is entirely typical for the Tsumkwe development scene.

It was the Trappe family’s turn to give their presentation first. Their strategy was, as they explained to me beforehand to explicitly show themselves as a family rather than just Matthias who was the one technically employed for the post. Matthias spoke of how they did not want to impose their ideas on them but rather wanted the San to come to them.



He introduced himself and his families background and how they were looking forward to being members of the community. Right about in the middle of this address, his youngest child crawled away from Renee and stumbled into her father's arms. "Almost as if it was right on queue" he laughed later.

Our presentation, however, did not go quite as smoothly. The plan had been for Eliza and another person to present the project in Ju|'hoan. I was not to be involved unless there were questions specifically for me. We were aware that this was somewhat breaking with tradition but it felt appropriate in the spirit of the project and was representative with the role I envisioned myself playing.

As soon as Eliza began to speak, however, we heard somebody shout "English!" Then several things were said in Ju|'hoan at once. "They want you to give the presentation. In English" Eliza said to me. Relatively unprepared, and somewhat resentful of a process that started to feel more and more procedural and pointless, I gave an overview of what we were going to do. When I finished my piece, and asked whether there were any questions, a black man in uniform in the back raised his hand and asked "Will this be only available to Bushmen or to all Namibians?" I started to speak to explain that actually, this was not a large-scale operation and we would only be in Tsumkwe and that by nature of our location the participants were likely to be largely San people. However, I was interrupted before I could finish by a fight that had broken out around the man. Apparently, a woman had objected to this man asking questions because he had no real stake in Nyae Nyae and he was not a San. The man had then replied something derogatory that nobody was willing to translate to me and quickly a San/non-San divide appeared across which everybody was shouting at everybody. Quickly, an elderly man and woman stepped in and everybody calmed down. Presumably visibly intimidated, I answered a few technical questions about the project and sat down. After our presentations, a lunch break was called and both the Trappe family, Eliza and I went back to Tsumkwe.

In some ways, our experience at the AGM made sense. The AGM as a concept - an event that consists of three days of talking with representatives from all villages - is consistent with the Ju|'hoansi having previously been known as the "people who talk a lot". Many things about our particular experience, however, did not seem to make sense. Who was it that was actually in power? Ju|'hoansi had alerted us to the AGM and helped us find it.

Did this mean that all the power in the situation rested with the Nyae Nyae foundation? On the other hand, the meeting seemed to be distinctly dominated by San voices and values, to the point that Black voices, while present, were not welcome. Did that mean the San were running the show? Why then, did they insist on me giving the presentation in English rather than Eliza giving it in Ju|'hoan? And finally, how did it make sense that the San welcomed Matthias and his family warmly but then never chose to engage with what he and TUCSIN offered?

### COMPETITION

While I don't believe it is the crux of the matter, competition of NGOs is definitely a factor in Tsumkwe. NGOs isolate themselves from others and there is a distinct lack of cooperation. Events like the AGM, where different NGOs are coming together are typically difficult (Stirrat, 2006).

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, NGOs and outsiders come to Tsumkwe with a preconceived idea of how the world, and the San within that world, works. It is when these different realities confront one another that conflict ensues. Each NGO wants to have their reality, their imagination of who the San are and what they need confirmed by being the most successful one.

One NGO worker, who had been working in Tsumkwe for a relatively long time but wanted to remain anonymous for the purpose of this quote explained it like this:

*I think, there are so many NGOs here... they try to remain separate to avoid conflict. Let's put it like this: If I act like I am the only one with a solution, I am less likely to be challenged.*

Me: "Solution to what?"

*To whatever. Education of course, unemployment, poverty, alcoholism, you name it. We don't come here to work with each other, we come here to work for the San – except that does not always go as planned.*

*Now that TUCSIN has bought the lodge, they act as if they had bought all of Tsumkwe. Now that is starting to cause conflict and people start to feel threatened.*

Me: “What people?”

*People who work for the organizations. You don't just come here because you need a job. You come here because you believe in something and none of us like our beliefs threatened.*

This account seemed to make sense and certainly reflected the experiences we had made with CEDU and the opposition we faced (see Chapter Two).

At this point I want to link back to the notion of the Trickster or Nomad, established in the previous chapter. The Trickster may have an impact on the above dynamic in two important ways: By reinforcing divisions on the one hand, and by the NGOs adopting too static a position on the other hand. Just as the Ju|'hoansi give into external ideas of Sanness brought to them by tourists, they are also typically welcoming towards ideas brought in by NGOs. “We just say yes to everything” George laments.

*I don't know if it is because Ju|'hoansi always have to agree or because they think they cant say no or because they think 'maybe I can get something from these people'. But we go along with everything. This is our conservancy, we could say no but we never ever do.*

K|ao, on the other hand, had a more positive outlook, and one that better represented the majority of comments I heard regarding this:

*We just go along with it because they are good ideas. The gardens are a good idea, even if many people have done it already. Or the crafting workshops. They are also a good idea.*

What K|ao suggested, as I teased out in a longer conversation, was that in the open-minded ways of the Trickster, the Ju|'hoansi were happy to appreciate the internal logic of a project, rather than how it was likely to play out in Tsumkwe.

This of course, would only serve to reaffirm outsiders in their conviction that they have found what the anonymous NGO worker referred to as “the solution” and that their world view was appropriate, justifying isolation from other projects and potential criticism.

At the same time, the nature of the ideas which NGOs bring with them is relatively static. As discussed above, NGOs are less likely to truly respond to Ju|'hoan culture than

they are to try to fit Tsumkwe into the mould of their own preconceived ideas. As such, they may struggle to move through the Pre-Archive efficiently.

While thinking about competition between the NGOs is helpful to a degree, this neglects San sociality. A more comprehensive understanding of this particular event and the development scene in Tsumkwe in general can be gained through a combination of what we learned about different San images in Trickster Space in the previous two chapters and specific San values and conflict resolution tools.

On a film set the way in which conflict is resolved is predetermined. Generally, the creator or director gets to pick which version of a character is true. If other people have an opinion on this, the creator still gets to decide in the end which one is true and which one is not. For smaller matters, there is also always the script to guide lower level conflicts.

If we now use the film set as a tool to think about Tsumkwe, as I am suggesting throughout this thesis, things start to make more sense. Like the film set, Tsumkwe is in a constant state of competition with regards to whose idea of the San is true and should be acted upon. What Tsumkwe lacks, however, is the hierarchical structure of the film set to decide which of the different ideas and notions is true. In thinking about how this conflict of truth is decided, one of the San's most famous cultural attributes, their egalitarianism, becomes relevant.

## Egalitarianism

One day during the film workshops, we were exploring 'story boarding'. I explained that it is useful to draw the film one wants to shoot in advance, frame by frame. I was fully aware that the same way I did not use story boards when I started to learn making films, the participants of the workshop would likely also never end up bothering with them and instead film the frames as they occurred to them (this later turned out to be true). However, I felt that this was a good opportunity to let people further explore the different kinds of frames we had been using.

Spirits were high because the exercises of late had been going very well. In the days prior to this, people had simply experimented with how to shoot things in different ways. As explained earlier, my intention throughout was to not explicitly tell people about, for

example, close-ups and long shots, but rather let a feeling for the language of the camera develop naturally through experimentation (as explained, my power to facilitate this was, of course, limited).

The storyboarding exercise was relatively simple. As a group, I suggested they should pick one of the stories they had been throwing around in their heads and draw a story board for it. This was after we had converted some of the shots from the previous exercise into drawings. However, despite a lot of motivation and positive spirit, the exercise seemed to fail.

Since I had talked about potential film ideas to each of them individually, I assumed that they would easily be able to pick one of the ideas to draw a story board. However, when it came to it, none of them wanted to volunteer their story. I tried to encourage individual participants to share their story but none of them were willing to. Instead, |Ui said : “Just tell us which story we should take. You decide.”

It occurred to me that it might be easiest to just tell them which story to pick. It would, most likely, speed up the process and make them feel better about doing the thing they were supposed to do.

Instead, however, I decided on another route. “Tell you what...” I said.

*I want to buy some cigarettes at the shop anyway. I'll leave for 10 minutes  
and by the time I come back, hopefully you will have decided.*

And with those words I left the somewhat dismayed group behind. I took a stroll to the shop, smoked a couple of cigarettes and had a chat with the shop attendant. After 20 minutes, I returned.

My strategy, it turned out, had been successful. The group had decided on the story of an elephant who was going to a village and the villagers trying to chase it away. This was not one of the stories I had heard yet. As George explained, this was a new story they had come up with for the exercise. Since we would not use this storyboard for any filming but rather just this exercise, they said, it would be unfair to use one of their ideas. When I came back, the group was already discussing how to design the storyboard. With this hurdle crossed, I was able to focus on just observing quietly.

George, the oldest of the group had taken on a role which struck me as very similar to the old men or women in villages. He was mostly listening, but intervening once in a while

if the conversation went into an unfavourable direction - for example if two people's opinion were in conflict. Also, once in a while he would summarise what had been said and add his own pinch of salt to the mix. In this constellation, people were happy and eager to contribute. A storyboard soon emerged.

One way to understand this scene is by considering what impact the role I was playing had on the situation. There was a distinct willingness to 'let me have my way' - that is to say, to participate in the exercise in exactly the way, the White person wanted them to. In the terms of the preceding part of this chapter, the participants were happy to adapt to my reality in a dynamic which is typical of the NGO/San relationship. One might then argue that the intrinsic and strong power dynamic which posited me as the one determining reality and the San as playing to it was disrupted by my leaving and forced the San to take charge instead.

This, however, would do discredit to the San as a cultural group and their ability to self-govern. I believe this situation is a good illustration of what defines the essential disconnect between NGOs and the San.

At this point I want to turn my attention to a subject which has not been given enough consideration in this thesis thus far despite being alluded to throughout. As explored in the first chapter, egalitarianism is one of the aspects of San identity which is often romanticized. In popular culture, frequent reference is made to the gentle San who live without hierarchies in a state which is often suggested to be somehow closer to nature. In scholarly San work, too, egalitarian social organisation appears again and again as a foundational characteristic of San sociality (Lawy, 2016, p. 64).

Most often understood as an economic and political practise, scholars have looked at egalitarianism from different perspectives (McCall & Widerquist, 2015) (Tanaka, 1980) (Sahlins & Banton, 1965) (Boehm, et al., 1993).

The initial impression of Tsumkwe might be that San tradition, among them egalitarian sociality have given way to more capitalist forces. I argue, however, that much like modernity and capitalism not being a unilateral force which unanimously hegemonises all aspects of San culture (Lee & Guenter, 1993, p. 228) the way in which egalitarianism is expressed in Tsumkwe has adapted, much like mobility has (see Chapter Four).

One might be tempted to argue that hierarchical power relations of NGOs are at odds with the egalitarian sociality of the San and that this is one of the reasons developmental efforts do not ‘click’. This is a popular interpretation among some NGO workers which carries with it the racist notions I briefly discussed in the previous chapter. Because the San are thought to be incapable of thinking rationally and planning for the future, some suggest, they are unable to respond to developmental efforts in the way that NGOs think they should.

*They should know that they have to stick to this and follow the plan, but that is just not how they think (NGO worker who worked on a project promoting frugality)*

In fact, several NGO workers expressed the notion that the San were unable to join the ‘modern world’ because they would not be able to speak for themselves. One development worker in Tsumkwe who wished to remain anonymous put it like this:

*They can’t ever be successful because it’s against their nature! If you want change you need a leader. Every time someone could be a leader, they bring them down. Who is going to speak for them?*

Whether or not the San in Tsumkwe are successful depends on one’s definition of success. If success is tied to wealth and the accumulation of goods, of course, individual success is at odds with the rules of egalitarianism.

Here it is important to remember that some San do leave Tsumkwe to pursue a more capitalist life elsewhere. Among the ones who remain in Nyae Nyae only few accumulate above average wealth. Fisser is an interesting example here. He has an active disdain for his cultural past<sup>17</sup> and is an unusually thrifty business man. He sells old tires, second hand clothes and joins whatever business venture is available to him. However, he does his business outside of Tsumkwe where he will not be judged. Further, the money he does accumulate is always spread across his family and friends in due measure. He is not happy about this.

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<sup>17</sup> In one conversation he noted that it was very difficult for him to marry his wife because he was not a good hunter and it took a long time to convince his wife’s family that their union would be a sensible idea.

*For every hour a person in Windhoek has to work, I have to work ten. For every shirt someone in Windhoek sells, I have to sell ten. Because when I have money I have to give to this person and to this person and to this and this and so on. If I was in Windhoek, I would be very rich. But here, I struggle.*

In fact, his statement seemed accurate. Considering that his wife was a politician and he was involved in several lucrative business ventures, their living standards were humble. Fisser and his wife did own a little stone house and a TV, but most their money was shared.

This occasional resentment towards having to share was also evident in his friendship with Joel. On the one hand, they were connected by a very deep and long lasting friendship. On the other hand, this relationship was carefully balanced on a tension of Joel asking for things or money and Fisser normally supplying it. When Joel, or for that matter other friends or family members, asked for too much, Fisser would hide from them for a while. Joel would then understand that he had pushed it too far and not ask for more for a few months. When I asked why he did not move away to somewhere where he could keep all his money Fisser replied:

*Maybe some day... But my family is here. I grew up here and I belong here. As long as they don't ask for too much I don't mind sharing. But maybe one day... we will see*

Joel, on the other hand had this to say:

*he has to share. He's San. If you want to be San you have to share.*

Wealth in Tsumkwe is normally hidden and what cannot be hidden is shared within reason. Because of this, the development worker cited above argues that there is no incentive for people to be innovative or “strive for something better”.

However, in the context of Tsumkwe, I want to argue that the disconnect between NGOs and the San is not merely shaped by external hierarchical structures and San egalitarianism being mutually exclusive or by there being a lack of incentive. Rather, I



argue that elements of egalitarianism, enacted consciously or subconsciously by the San, actively control the behavioural scope of NGOs in this San place.

While egalitarianism is often romanticized, popular understandings of it neglect how it can be a constricting force. Levelling techniques or 'reverse domination' (Boehm et al. 1993) keep those who strive for leadership in check and make sure that no one, regardless of achievement, has more power than anybody else.

### LEVELLING MECHANISMS

This was evident in Tsumkwe especially among the local San elite. One evening I was having dinner with George, Fisser and Boyscout. All three of them are relatively wealthy - evident by their families' slightly above average clothes and, in the case of George and Boyscout, the fact that they were overweight - a rare occurrence among Ju|'hoansi, most of whom are very slim. Malnourishment remains a serious issue throughout Nyae Nyae. The three of them had had many opportunities in life that others in Tsumkwe did not have - for example travel to international destinations. All of them were part of the local elite. They were movers and shakers - people who through their networking would be able to open doors and get things done (which is what made them wealthy).

George was the oldest son of the chief and one of the most experienced tourist guides - he had even managed the lodge for a while. Fisser was married to the regional minister and Boyscout had travelled all across Europe to aid scientists there with his superior tracking skills (see previous chapter).

The social situation with George and Fisser over dinner, however, presented another story. As Boyscout helped himself to the meat from the buffet at the lodge where we were having dinner, Fisser said "yo, meat is only for the good hunters, not for you." George at this point joined in and said "yes, look at how fat you are. You can't be a good hunter and be so fat". They continued to tease Boyscout who, rather than responding by returning what a 'Western' observer might have considered banter, became rather quiet and looked almost ashamed. This in no way deterred the other two men.

In George's case, who himself ate a lot of meat that evening, this was of course hypocritical. Moreover, though, being a good hunter is defined by being a good track reader - as one informant told me, it takes only a week or so to attain the skill of shooting at something but it takes an entire lifetime to master the art of reading tracks. Boyscout's

tracking skills had not only put to shame Western scientists, they were also known all across Nyae Nyae. When one had difficult tracks to read, Boyscout was called.

Rather than being merely good hearted jokes, Fisser and George's remarks were a levelling technique, designed to make Boyscout remember to not be too boastful. Because it seemed such a striking example to me I later asked George about it over a cigarette. Having been friends with anthropologists all his life, he knew what the term 'levelling mechanism' was referring to.

*Yeah, I guess it is a levelling mechanism. When I was doing it I did not think about it like that... it's like an impulse.... when we see someone who could do better than us we have to pull them down. We are very worried about anybody being above us because we think it pushes us EVEN lower! (laughs)*

It is telling that both George, who was in private often very critical of San etiquette and Fisser, who would have appreciated egalitarian notions to have less of an impact on his wealth accumulation, both so forcefully took part in levelling mechanisms. It makes sense that among the relative San elite, this kind of levelling technique is more common than elsewhere in Tsumkwe, where perhaps lack of opportunity prevents people from taking on too dominant a position anyway. Nonetheless, there are other, more drastic techniques to deal with San who resist egalitarian sociality in Nyae Nyae.

When I arrived in Nyae Nyae and made my first visit to ||a|oba, |Gamache struck me as someone who was not particularly happy. He was always sitting away from the others, not joining the conversations. When I asked Joel what the matter was he replied:

*Ah, he's just grumpy. He is not happy with how they run the camp site.*

Through gossip, I later heard that |Gamache was threatening to leave the village. Then, I heard that the village was threatening to throw |Gamache out. The point of contention was that |Gamache was running the campsite but had not been keeping the books as carefully as he should have and the village suspected (from what I gathered rightfully so) that money had disappeared into his pocket. After the village had tried to carefully negotiate a solution for several months, |Gamache was faced with an ultimatum: He either had to step down from his position as book keeper or he had to leave the village.

The next time I returned to ||a|oba, |Gamache seemed like a different man. He was sitting with the other villagers, and chatting away. “I thought you wanted to leave?” I asked. “Oh no, he said, everything has been solved now.”

Later, one of the older village members explained the situation to me. |Gamache, they said, is in a difficult position because he is not from Nyae Nyae. He is in fact !Kung, not Ju|’hoan and comes from Grasshoek. Because of this, it is easier for him to level threats of leaving. At this point I interjected: “Why is this a threat, what is so bad about him leaving?”

*Oh, he can leave anytime he likes. But maybe he feels that if he leaves like this he cannot come back.*

“So who is the threat to? Himself?”

*It’s just a bad thing. We don’t want bad things.*

The ultimate threat the community was able to level against |Gamache in response to what they considered his greed was expulsion. |Gamache clearly made the decision that his membership of the village was more important than his pride and his interpretation of how things should be run.

#### LEVELLING TECHNIQUES AGAINST NGOS

These levelling techniques play a crucial part in what kind of success the various projects and NGOs have in Tsumkwe. The egalitarianising technique employed against NGOs is the same as the one employed against |Gamache under the motto ‘if you don’t play by our rules you have to go’. These levelling techniques make particular sense in the context of the San initially accepting all NGOs realities and notions of San identity. However, external forces are only allowed to remain as long as they submit to the egalitarian sociality of realities and do not attempt to dominate.

As he was always eager to discuss the shortcomings of politics in Tsumkwe, I went to George to ask him who decided if a project was bad and what this decision was based on. “Does the chief decide when it’s time to let a project know they should leave?” I asked. George looked exasperated.

*You know about this thing that you guys call 'egalitarianism', right?*

"Yes." I replied. "Everybody is equal."

*No, it means, there is no leader. The chief has power from the government. He could block a project but he almost never does. [...] having no leader means nobody wants anybody to have more power or better things than them. When people don't like a project because they are jealous, maybe they will start telling other people that it is a bad project and make it harder for the project to succeed. and after a while, people will no longer go to the project because they feel they are letting their community down<sup>18</sup>.*

"If it's about levelling, why don't you use humour then, like with each other?" I asked, referring to the conversation quoted earlier. "The jokes is a San thing...", George replied readily.

*I don't think they would 'get' it. You always have to speak to people in a language they understand.*

This explanation corresponded well with my general observations and the obstacles we had faced with CEDU – including the phone call that was made to the Ministry of Information about our workshops by a Ju|'hoansi for fear of missing out. After the initial phase of acceptance and being welcomed, projects in Tsumkwe were often slowed down by lack of cooperation by the San or fizzled out because of lack of participation.

The same was true for projects that managed to maintain their presence. Dave's schooling project, for instance, was unsuccessful by his own admission because San parents offered only a minimum of engagement with it. As a result, he limited his activities to support that they did appreciate, despite those activities not being part of his mission statement. This meant, largely, providing lifts to people. Non-participation with projects which were seen to have extended their welcome was extremely common. However, I am not entirely certain that I fully subscribe to George's rather cynical analysis.

Another important factor when considering why people withdrew their support or participation from projects was their mobility mentioned in the previous chapter and the

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<sup>18</sup> Quote summarised

unstable nature of people's employment and responsibilities. When I asked individuals why they had stopped going to the English courses offered by TUCSIN, for instance, people responded with excuses largely pertaining to having (or wanting) to be somewhere else.

In the end, what exactly the reasons are for people to withdraw support from a project varies but is also somewhat beyond my ability to know. If not going to TUCSIN's workshop was a sign of protest, as George suggested, I do not believe I would have been privy to that information.

Whatever the reason for support or participation waning, projects often left Tsumkwe frustrated. The following are quotes from NGO workers who either used to work in Tsumkwe or were at the time of my fieldwork. On this subject, all asked to remain anonymous:

*I have no plans to go back. It was a very humbling experience. Humbling in a bad way. Frustrating. I don't believe the San needed what [her organisation] had to offer them. In the end, I felt unwanted.*

*No, I wouldn't [go back to Tsumkwe]. I feel like they get on alright. It was very uncomfortable and awkward over the last few months. Frankly, I didn't want to end up like Dave, sucked into the black hole of Tsumkwe, so I am glad when we left.*

*I cannot wait to leave. It was fun while it lasted but everything has become so difficult. It's one step forward, five steps back.*

*It's a test of endurance, you know? How much frustration can you endure? How little assurance do you need for knowing that things will turn out alright? Can you look at yourself in the mirror?*

*It's tough. I like knowing that projects will go to plan. And as soon as there is a plan here, things will grind to a halt and literally go the other way. So yeah, I look forward to going back to Windhoek.*

The last two chapters argued that Nyae Nyae, and specifically Tsumkwe, is a nomadic, fluid space that lacks hegemony. As much as the Trickster thrives under these conditions, organisations and individuals with too static an approach will find this space frustrating for its lack of structure and reliability. Egalitarianism here, works as an inhibitor for anyone amassing power. As George's surprise at his own use of levelling mechanisms directed at Boy Scout show, egalitarian dynamics do not necessarily need to be a conscious act. It may be that the Ju|'hoansi are not purposefully casting organisations out, but their lack of commitment and their mobility, true to Deleuze, make it difficult for outside projects to establish themselves in the way they first imagine.

The Trappe family and their work for TUCSIN were a primary example. From relatively early on, there was a sense that they were trying to control not only the lodge but all of Tsumkwe. Quickly after their arrival, the organisation (not the Trappe family) announced plans for transforming several other buildings and institutions in Tsumkwe – such as the library and the Craft Center and using and running them as their own. While the outrage over this was more audible from other NGO workers and outsiders, it was the Ju|'hoansi's non-participation which scaled TUCSIN's influence down.

I believe that these egalitarian processes are possibly quite particular to Tsumkwe and the Nyae Nyae conservancy. To illustrate this, let us cast our mind back to Arno, whom we met in the second chapter. Because of his dissatisfaction with Tsumkwe, he moved his longstanding tourism business to Nhoma. The village of Nhoma, importantly, is just outside the Nyae Nyae Conservancy and does not enjoy the legal freedoms and dense social ties, which villages within the conservancy benefit from.

Even though the Ju|'hoansi here want Arno to leave and there is a willing development entrepreneur to take over and transform the tourism business, Arno is successfully refusing to leave. Instead, relationships with the Ju|'hoansi are deteriorating to a point where people wish him dead and resent the power he has over them (see Chapter Two).

This chapter raises questions about power and development in Tsumkwe. Not all of these questions I am able to provide an answer for. One such question that follows from this account is whether any NGOs would be able to provide a structure which is equally egalitarian and does not suffer from the same problems of social translation, whether such an NGO would have to come from the Ju|'hoansi themselves and whether it would then

compromise their San-ness (considered by Jenny Lawy in her doctoral thesis (Lawy, 2016)).

What I do hope to have provided here is a sense of a developmental scene where local dynamics are not automatically overruled by international values. Failure to establish themselves and have their projects go to plan is not merely an issue of cultural translation between the Ju|'hoansi and the NGOs. Rather, Ju|'hoan sociality and egalitarianism, against the backdrop of a creative, image dominated, pre-archival space that lacks hegemony, have power over those outsiders who are not able to adapt.

## 7. CRAFTING OUTSIDE SPACES

*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*

*(Derrida)*

### OVERTURE

One evening, a few friends and I were having a braai in the bush on the outskirts of Tsumkwe. The group, not associated with CEDU and purely there for some socialising on a Winter night consisted of Eliza, her cousin /'ui, several of her female cousins, a White Canadian traveller we had met a few weeks prior named Karl, and me.

Late into the evening, after the sun had already set completely and the area was being lit up only by our small fire, a giggling figure emerged from the bush. Swaying back and forth, with her hands suspended in mid-air as if she was about to grasp her own head, she walked in our general direction without seeming to purposefully approach us.

While Karl and I were not sure how to react, Eliza called out to the woman and walked up to her. Half in conversation with Eliza, half turning towards us, the woman began yelling incomprehensively, interspersed with shrieking laughter and bursts of giggling which almost knocked her over.

While Eliza attempted to calm the woman down and communicate with her (and her cousins continued to chat around the fire) Karl finally broke the shocked silence that had paralysed us both ever since the woman had emerged from the darkness:

*She's hysterical.*

I remember thinking that the word 'hysterical' was inappropriate. After all, the notion of hysteria is inseparable from a particular historical and cultural context. In the process of working on the following chapter, however, I have come to realise that this incident speaks to the subjects of pressure and release as well as the intersection of Ju|'hoan and European-American values.



## INTRODUCTION

In the last three chapters I have discussed the makeup, movement within and rules of Tsumkwe as a space defined by images of San-ness. I have described how the world which the Ju|'hoansi of Tsumkwe inhabit, defined by expectations around being a 'real' San, constitutes an 'inside'. While the last chapter briefly discussed the process of being cast out permanently, this chapter will look at people who temporarily *escape* to an 'outside' in order to recover from ongoing social pressures experienced on the inside. This chapter, in other words, considers whether and how the Pre-Archive can be stepped out of and its images rendered temporarily powerless. Importantly, it picks up the notion of 'mastery', introduced in Chapter Five, as a requirement for playing with the rules and boundaries set by the image archive.

This 'outside' I speak of, like the inside it positions itself against, is socially constructed. On the inside, meaning is given to images of being San and maintained and negotiated through social interactions. The 'outside', on the other hand, is created by a desire of Ju|'hoansi for a space where they can *disassociate* from San images. I argue that some Ju|'hoansi socially fabricate temporary outside spaces for the purpose of getting away from the pressure of both San sociality and expectations from outsiders. Some of these spaces are created only by San, but many are created in collaboration with outsiders, crafting a space where play-acting allows both parties to distance themselves from the pressures of their identity and experiment with how they relate to one another.

The Ju|'hoansi who I observed creating these kinds of spaces were often influential gatekeepers within the San community and thus particularly vulnerable to both kinds of pressures. They were also all particularly skilled at moving flexibly and Trickster-like through the pre-archival 'inside' space (see chapter Five). This allowed them to use humour to *play* with the images of the archive.

To create a socially constructed, temporary Outside, this chapter argues, requires two elements: A sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the 'inside' social landscape and its inhabitants (Mastery, see chapter Three) and humorous play. Humour, or more specifically racist humour, is used as a tool of disassociation from San identity and marking out appropriate individuals to share the 'outside' space with.

I begin my argument with an ethnography about Ju|'hoan people having a tendency to literally stay in touch with sand. This serves as a metaphor to explore the process of

immersion and withdrawal. Tracking, which is also situated in sand, provides us with an example where mastery and disassociation provides the hunter with a unique outside perspective.

I then give an account of an eccentric German Namibian who, to the horror of many researchers and San associates, has a habit of indulging in racist humour with the Ju|'hoansi who visit his guesthouse. Using also the example of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* I begin trying to explore the problematic of San images being made fun of and ask what it means when they insist that 'It's just funny'.

I argue ultimately that the Ju|'hoansi participate in San-defamatory humour only with particular individuals as a method of creating a space where pressures and power inequalities can be caricatured. My final example shows how this does not only alleviate pressures from the San but also from the outsider<sup>19</sup> who is included in this process.

#### GETTING AWAY

As I explored in the previous chapter, Tsumkwe, with its various expectations to be managed and complex relationships to be negotiated inside the sociality of egalitarianism, can feel rather oppressive. Especially for those of my interlocutors who were exposed to those pressures, such as tour guides and gatekeepers like Joel, George and Boy Scout, this was an ongoing issue. On the one hand, they had to carefully navigate contact with outsiders and take on representative or leadership roles; on the other hand, they had to be careful to not be seen to think of themselves as above other Ju|'hoansi. As Boy Scout explained, to be part of an egalitarian society can mean to be socially tied to other people in ways one does not always appreciate:

*When you wake up, somebody wants something from you*

*When you drink your coffee in the morning, you must give to this person or that person.*

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<sup>19</sup> A note on the usage of the term outside: Throughout this thesis, I refer to people who are not Ju|'hoansi but come to Tsumkwe with an interest in San as 'outsiders'. These outsiders are not automatically part of the deliberately fabricated 'Outside' I describe here.

*When you want to do something for yourself you must go and explain to this person and this person and this person.*

*If you arrive somewhere and maybe you just want to greet your friend and sit with them you must also speak to this person and this and this.*

*When you have anything you must share it – your food, your money, your time, your sleep, even yourself.*

“What do you mean, ‘yourself?’”

*It just means even if I think something is a bad idea, I have to do it because of other people.*

While acknowledged as something that only occurred occasionally, this sentiment was echoed among all Trickster figures (people who made their fortune by moving fluidly and flexibly through the landscape of San images) I interviewed. The focus of this frustration varied. Some were frustrated primarily about having to share money, others about sharing space or their time. Generally, these Ju|’hoansi expressed that expectations around sharing and status equality presented those who had resources to share – be it money, influence, living space or food – with occasional discomfort. This was felt even though, as I was told over and over again, to be San means to share.

At the same time, many of these interlocutors reported being prone to frustration by excessive contact with outsiders where they had to reiterate their San-ness over and over again.

*You go and explain to the tourists that you are a San and what the San do and how they live... and the first time it’s fine. And the next time it’s fine, and the next time it’s fine but one day it’s not fine anymore and you are exhausted from saying the same things over and over again.*

*And then maybe in the afternoon you go to a meeting with somebody and they have a different idea and then you must talk about that version of*

*things. You must always say the right thing at the right time and you say some things over and over again. (George)*

In sum, frustrations were born from expectations around being San – either expectations that other Ju|’hoansi had of them, or expectations of performing San-ness that fit in with outsider’s images and ideas. While these Tricksters or gatekeepers navigated Tsumkwe fluidly and flexibly to both their own advantage and that of others, maintaining a multitude of images in the process, it was also the very core element of this environment – San-ness in its many versions – which caused their frustration.

One of the ways of dealing with this frustration was to simply get away for a while:

*Sometimes you need to be by yourself so you are the most important person in that moment. (Boyscout)*

*Sometimes you have to go away from all the other people so you can remember who you are. (Joel)*

*When I am tired of all the people wanting things I go away for a while. Maybe to the bush or to Grootfontein with my wife and then when I am back I have patience again and I can do all the things I need to do and give everybody what I am supposed to give them. (George)*

This reflected an overall trend. It seemed that in order to be active in this space dominated by ideas about San-ness, it was important to step out from time to time in order to rest and recover. An important element of this seemed to be to disassociate oneself from the complexities of living in this space saturated by San images and expectations. In descriptions of both the frustrations and the ‘getting away’, the notion of the self versus the group played a large part. The self, it seemed, was undervalued and under-emphasised in day to day life for the benefit of the greater social whole that it was part of. It was this sense of self that needed to be recharged by disassociation from the larger group through a somewhat temporary emancipation where neither the rules of San sociality nor external expectations of San-ness had to be adhered to.

For the remainder of this chapter I will examine how Outside spaces are crafted within social contexts through the use of humour and a mastery of the Inside. Before I further discuss the process of *withdrawal*, however, I am going to explore *immersion* through an ethnographic account.

## Impressions in the Sand

Komtsa is letting fine sand run through his fingers as he is listening to Nisa. They are sitting outside of Nisa's hut, a house typical of the Tsumkwe area. It is based loosely on the concept of a grass hut but complemented by blankets and plastic sheets covering part of its half-spherical shape. Pans, cups and anything important is hanging off the load bearing branches to stop them getting lost in the endless sea of sand.

Nisa is sitting as if she were planted into this spot in the shade. One leg angled towards herself with the knee comfortably touching the ground and the other leg stretched out far away from her, with her heel dug deeply into the sand. With her left arm she is supporting the small child who is resting in the groove of her angled leg, with her right hand she is picking beads spread out in front of her on a blanket to add them to a bracelet she is holding in her left hand. She talks, Komtsa listens.

They speak too fast and with too much of a dialect for me to understand everything. I believe Nisa is venting about her younger cousin who is drinking too much. From there the conversation goes somewhere in the region of wildlife conservation politics but I am not sure. I am not particularly interested in the specifics. What I am more interested in is what they are doing with their bodies as they speak.

Once in a while, Nisa gesticulates with her left hand, pointing the needle she uses for stringing up the beads emphasis. While she is firmly planted to the ground and what she is doing - holding a baby while weaving jewellery, her right heel dug in the sand, her left leg framing her, the baby, and the crafting - Komtsa seems half there, half ready to go. His left leg is resting on the ground, angled towards him similar to Nisa's, but his right foot is planted squarely on the ground, close to him, inviting his upper body to lean against his knee. He is focussed on Nisa's voice, not looking directly at her, his face seeming to point at the beads in front of her. From time to time he interjects a thoughtful "hmmm" to indicate agreement and that he is paying attention. His right hand,

absentmindedly, as if it had a mind of its own, keeps picking up pinches of sand, next to his right foot. He raises his hand a few inches and then lets the sand run through his finger tips from where the sand gently falls through the windless cool morning air to form a cone on the ground.

Throughout the conversation – even when he is talking – Komtsa stays in touch with the sand. Running his fingers along the ground through the sand and letting the sand run through his fingers. When I ask him about this later, he laughs and tells me he never does it consciously.

“It’s just something I’ve always done. Maybe it’s part of me.” He laughs.

But Komtsa is not alone in incorporating the sand around him into his conversations. This is a trend I noticed among many San. To somewhat generalise my observation, it was more often men than women who played with or used sand in conversation, and among men it was more often hunters and older (not adolescent) men. Most used sand the way Komtsa did – letting it fall through their fingers into a cone shape, which would have been evocative of hourglasses in a different context.

But people also used the sand as more ostensible props in conversation. People would draw in the sand to illustrate plans, drawing circles and lines, narrating movements of people and animals while suggesting it with the movement of their own fingers in the sand. Even when people were standing, they would often and easily drop to the floor to establish a connection with the sand – either to let it run through their hands as they were thinking or to draw shapes that would illustrate plans and ideas. One particularly philosophical man I met even used different shapes to illustrate different kinds of thoughts.

“Some people’s head is like this” he said as he drew a straight line in the sand. “And others like this” as drew a squiggly line. Then he drew several squiggly lines going in different directions from a central point. “And some people, again, their heads are like this.”

“Is one of those ways better than the others?” I ask. He draws a circle around each of the illustrations in turn. “If you use only this, it’s worse than the other two, or if you use only this, it is also worse. All are important. If you just see this, or this or this (pointing at each circle) you cannot see THIS” He draws a larger circle that encompasses the three individual circles.

“Hmm.” I say. “So what’s outside the circle?”

He shrugs.

Connection with the land is a frequent feature both in popular imaginations of the San and in anthropological literature (see Chapter One). What I hope to have shown in the above ethnographic account is that there is not only a spiritual connection to the land, but a concrete incorporation of the land (sand) into conversations. Being in the land, is to touch it and immerse oneself in it.

As a departure point, this could be taken into several directions. One might use this to make an argument about gender to start investigating how the relationship to the land might be a gendered experience. Another subject to possibly link this to would be conservation and land claims. However, in line with the argument my thesis has made so far, I will use ‘being literally in touch with the land’ as a departure point to think about being ‘outside’.

As a metaphor, I would like to bring this back to the considerations of outside and ‘inside’ from the very beginning of this chapter. If the sand represents the social environment of Tsumkwe, the Ju|’hoansi are the fingers that run through it in fluid lines, reconfiguring the social landscape and being reconfigured by it in return. What happens, metaphorically speaking, when one loses touch with the sand? How, socially, would the Ju|’hoansi achieve this and why would they want to?

In order to explore these questions I will take some routes around my ethnographic material. From touching sand, I will move on to reading tracks, to mastery and from there to the appropriation of racist humour.

## INTERPRETING TRACKS

As mentioned above, the tendency to stay in touch with the ground was most noticeable among hunters. In part, as Komtsa explained, this was because one has to know the sand before one can read tracks in it. I touched on this before in this thesis but it bears repeating. Hunting, among the Ju|’hoansi is a highly skilled activity. While the actual act of shooting can be learned in a few weeks, the core element of hunting – reading tracks – takes many years to master and it is therefore not until they are in their late twenties or early thirties that men are considered hunters in their own right.

I mentioned in Chapter Five, that reading tracks is based on the producing and contesting of hypotheses which ideally happens in discourse between several individuals. Reading tracks happens, in most cases and especially when precision is necessary, in conversation. One hunter, for example, might find the track of an animal and start narrating what he sees, suggesting that the animal walked here and went to the water at a certain time of day. Another hunter might interject and point out that, actually, these particular tracks here show that the animal turned its head to look to the side (evident in the way its shifting weight is visible in the prints of the two front feet) and then changed direction. Then the third hunter might have something to add and so on and so forth, until the group feels confident in their assessment of what happened.

The level of sophistication at which the Ju|'hoansi are able to read tracks is hard to over-emphasise. From a single footprint, Boy Scout was able to tell us the gender and age of the elephant that caused it, what time exactly it passed by, where it was going and whether it was likely that it would return. I watched three hunters from Nkhoma follow a pack of wild dogs under the light of a waxing moon. Joseph could tell the footprints of everyone in his village apart at a glance

Provided they knew the terrain – a detail which is important for our using sand as metaphor of the social environment of Tsumkwe - Ju|'hoansi hunters were not only able to identify the animal that left the tracks but also tell their size, gender and age from a single footprint. If there were several footprints, they could start hypothesising and discussing what time exactly it passed by, what mood it was in, where it was going next and why, how fast it was moving, where it turned its head to look at something, what it had likely looked at, where it had been before, and where it would likely be now.

While reading tracks is a well known and often celebrated feature of how the San are imagined, it is not very often written about, other than to remark on its scientific qualities (for instance, Blurton Jones & Konner, 1976). An exception to this is Chris Low's "Khoisan wind: hunting and healing" which considers tracking in context with wind and healing as a process of being pulled along a string which leads to a destination. Low's argument, however, refers to the whole journey of hunting. I am interested in the specific moment of being confronted with a track and reacting to it.

What I want to do here, is show how what happens during tracking speaks to how some Ju|'hoansi are able to deal with the highly complex and loaded social environment



that exists around their image. I will also argue that in order to read tracks, Ju|'hoan hunters move to an outside position in order to make sense of tracks.

There are several different categories of and words for 'tracks' in Ju|'hoan. One of the general terms for tracks is *òòàsi*. *Oòàsi* can also be translated to *doings*. As Joseph explains, "everything that is being done by someone [human or animal] can be seen if you know how to look". The activity itself and its traces are so intertwined with one another that linguistically they merge together into *òòàsi*. Tracks, in Ju|'hoan are looked at, looked for and found.

In English, we have available the terms 'tracking' and 'reading tracks'. Tracking, when used in a Namibian English context, refers to the overall activity of finding the tracks of an animal and following it. Reading tracks, or 'spoore lees' in Afrikaans refers more specifically to the moment of looking at the tracks and drawing information from it. It is this moment I am particularly interested in.

Initially, the term 'reading' tracks seems to make sense. After all, information is gleaned from visual cues. Further, just as a literate person will involuntarily read any word they see, rather than having to make a conscious effort to decode the individual letters, reading tracks becomes involuntary to the trained hunter. The information of who walked where, at what time becomes available immediately. When he narrates tracks to me, Joseph explains, he is looking at the tracks further ahead while he comments on the ones right in front of me, similar to how, when one reads a text aloud the eyes are always a few words ahead of the voice.

Apart from the similarities with regards to these mechanics, however, the notion of 'reading' is misleading. The tracks in the sand are not an intentionally inscribed code. Animals are not communicating with humans when they leave their footprints on the ground. Neither do humans, usually. Rather, tracks are 'literal impressions' (Derrida, 1998, p. 99) which can be interpreted with enough knowledge of the world they are in. They are artefacts of movement.

To the knowledgeable hunter, complex stories can unfold from these artefacts. In order for this to happen, however, they need an intimate knowledge of the environment and how everything – from humans to elephants to the sand itself – usually acts and interacts with each other. The time of day, or rather, the position of the Sun which is the Ju|'hoansi's

preferred method of telling time, has an impact on the temperature of the sand which in turn determines how easily the sand collapses inside the track and how crisp a footprint the animal leaves.

Interpreting tracks, in a word, requires a *mastery* of knowledge and perception of the surroundings. This brings us back to Chapter Five in which I discussed ways in which the Ju|'hoansi are able to occupy multiple truths and move through the pre-archival space. To transgress boundaries and creatively merge different spheres with one another requires a certain element of mastery and confidence. Not everybody has the makings of a Trickster. Similarly, not everybody can be a masterful hunter.

Mastery of the environment means to know exactly where to look, and what to listen to, what perceptions to pay attention to (Chris Low p.76). It is not only knowledge that has to be acquired but the skill of applying this knowledge in a way that produces useful information has to be mastered.

Once removed from his usual environment, even the best Ju|'hoan hunter will struggle to bring together a detailed and accurate interpretation. Of course, this does not mean that the skills are no longer useful but they are somewhat diminished.

“Around my village”, Joseph explains, “nothing is secret. I can glance at the ground and I know immediately what happened at what time. Around Nyae Nyae, I am very confident. But if I went to Windhoek for example, to read tracks there, I would have to think, talk with people, get used to it. A little bit like a language.”

The fact that one needs to master the particular environment in order to read tracks well explains why it takes so long to become a hunter to be reckoned with. But once this mastery has been attained, it becomes a powerful skill. To look at the ground with the sophisticated eye of a knowledgeable hunter means to be able to step away from it, to zoom in and out, to travel back and forth through time and watch two events happen at once. With only one glance, the hunter can choose to see the many animals at once which passed this spot through the last few days or he can choose to focus on one track, on one moment in one animal's life. He can see either a whole stampede or the particular moment in which one antelope got startled. He can tell where the cheetah came from and make predictions about whether or not he is going to catch the antelope. And he can see the aardvark take a nocturnal stroll crossing the path of a lizard running through the midday heat.

One way to interpret the process of tracking would be to argue that the hunter projects himself into the animal he tracks. I argue, that the opposite is the case. While hunters often teach younger men by simulating animal movements and inviting students to project themselves into the psyche of an animal, at the actual moment of being faced with tracks the hunters are anything but stuck in an individual animal.

*If I follow the track of this Springbok, I still see all the other tracks. They all belong together. (Joseph)*

A hunter perceives the totality of an event within which tracks of an individual animal make sense. He is not limited to an individual. Further, he is not limited to a specific moment in time. It is this ability to perceive a whole that suggests an *outside* position. Incidentally, in an extension of the metaphor of sand, when the Ju|'hoansi read tracks, they do *not* touch the sand. The moment of interpreting tracks, when the hunter is able to zoom in and out and collapse time, points us towards a space which is removed from the temporal realm which the animals, who caused the tracks, occupy. A perspective from which past, present, future and spatial relations can be collapsed and unfolded at will as long as the observer has first obtained mastery over the inside. To know the inside means that one can move outside it to a position where its limits (in this case focussing on a single individual or temporal constraints) do not apply.

## Racist Jokes at Maori

So, what if the process of obtaining an outside perspective, to disassociate oneself through sophisticated knowledge and perception could be translated into the social sphere of the Pre-Archive? What if there was a way for the Ju|'hoansi to adopt this perspective as a way of getting away, of getting some rest outside of the restrictions made of a combination of egalitarianism and the multiple demands made of them in their capacity as icons of human origin? In this section I will explore incidents of racist humour which the Ju|'hoansi participate in and ask what it means for something to be, as they claim, “just funny”.

I struggle to describe the impression Peter made on his immediate environment without running the risk of seeming negatively biased. While I spent a lot of time with his wife and him during fieldwork, and we did on occasion get along, I found him, overall, repelling. Whether this was due to his frequent derogatory comments on my appearance, actions and personality, because of his grotesque German accent, or his verbally abusive relationship with his wife I do not know. Either way, it was not something Peter cared about. When I asked him whether I had his permission to write about him he said:

*Write about me? Where? In your little essay?*

“In my PhD thesis, yes.”

*Ach, wer liest das schon! (lit translates to “Well, who is going to read it?”, implying categorically that in fact no one will”)*

“Well, at least two people will have to read it”

*Oh man, shut up with your uni bullshit. Write whatever you want as long as it's the truth. I have nothing to hide. I am as the lamb before God... hehehe*

With that he loudly rose to his feet and left the breakfast table.

His wife Connie, somewhat confused, turned towards me: “what are you going to write about him?”

*Whatever I want, I guess, as long as it's the truth.*

“Oh dear” Connie laughs.

Peter is, by all accounts, a strange man. He and his wife moved to Namibia from Germany just over 12 years ago. They bought some land on the outskirts of Grootfontein. Over the years, they built – themselves, brick by brick – a guesthouse and a large campsite. “Maori”, as it is confusingly called, referring to the original name of the site, not the indigenous people in New Zealand, is successful in providing affordable accommodation to all sections of Namibian society as well as camping tourists. Because their accommodation is less glamorous than strictly tourism oriented establishments they manage to have

paying guests all year round (in contrast to many of the hotels who have suffered severely from the financial crisis).

In the 12 years that Peter and his wife have lived in Grootfontein, they have grown apart. She, chain-smoking but outstandingly athletic at 50 years old with short, wild hair, has established several Kindergardens for disadvantaged children in Grootfontein's township. She has many good friends across the Black community, is constantly on the move, fundraising, or supporting philanthropic initiatives such as collecting second hand clothes from Europe.

Her husband Peter, on the other hand, keeps largely to himself. He speaks no Afrikaans and barely any English. He is explicitly rude to many of his guests, frequently has public shouting matches with his wife and has pointed guns at government officials for coming to his house and asking bureaucratic questions he did not know the answer to.

One evening I am having a drink with his wife outside as a big, impeccably clean Land Cruiser pulls up. A very large, Black man in uniform steps out while on the phone. Peter, having risen from the sofa where he was watching German TV steps out of the reception building holding a torch light. He shines it at the man who is still on the phone.

*Peter: NO PHONE!!<sup>20</sup>*

"I am sorry Sir, I just have to finish this call"

*Peter: Not here!*

I am sorry, Sir, just one moment.

*Peter: No, not one moment!*

Peter turns around and goes back inside. The man finishes his phone call and follows him inside. Through the open door, we can vaguely hear Peter yelling obscenities, about phones, how late it is and that there are no free rooms. To the shouts of "Go! Go!" The man leaves the reception area and approaches Connie.

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<sup>20</sup> Peter's pet peeve is people using their phones in the vicinity of his reception area when all their other actions seem to suggest they want to be helped by him. He considers this a waste of his time.

*Ma'am, please talk to your husband. I need a room for the night*

"If we're full, we're full – there is nothing I can do" she responds.

*But I called...*

Peter comes back outside:

*You call for room yesterday not for today. Because you Army and SWAPO  
you think you can do what you want. But you just go back into town and  
bring woman back for boom boom. I don't want you people here!*

"I can pay!" He takes a heavy wallet out of his pocket.

*You go to Tiger Lodge with that or I go and get my gun!*

The man shakes his head in disbelief. "You are insane man, this is not right!"

As the man leaves, Connie asks Peter, in German: "Do we really not have any rooms left?"

"Not for his kind." Peter replies and goes back inside.

Lighting another cigarette, Connie mutters, half to herself, half to me:

*Sometimes I think the only reason he is neither dead nor in prison is because  
people think he is so ridiculous he can't be serious...*

A little later, a pick-up truck, loaded heavily with bags and people, pulls up in front of the reception. The driver is a Ju|'hoansi from Tsumkwe. On the passenger seat next to him are two young Ju|'hoan women, each with a baby strapped to them. On their lap sits a little boy. On the back of the truck there are seven more people, all from Tsumkwe.

Peter emerges from the reception area and a smirk briefly dances across his face as he furrows his brows.

*Yo, Bushmen! We no want you here!*

A man on the back of the pickup truck responds as he climbs down.

*Yo, Peter! You're the Bushman!*

Peter laughs. "No. You Bushman"

"No. Peter Bushman!" The man who climbed off the track is now standing bravely in front of Peter who is shining his torch light right into his face, grinning.

*Peter, We need three rooms for tonight and tomorrow night.*

Peter switches off his torch.

"oooooh.... three rooms is maybe difficult" He starts counting the people on the back of the pickup truck shining his torch at them. "Is only ten pax! You Bushman, you small, you can fit in one room."

*hah. No, Peter.*

"Ok, one moment, let me see." He puts his torch into one of the many pockets on his trousers and goes back inside and emerges with three keys.

*This is number four and number five. This one is for the room by the garage.*

*You know which one?*

The man nods. "Yeah, thank you Peter".

"But no boom boom!" Peter shouts with a smile in his voice as the truck is turning around to drive to one of the rooms and the man jumping back on it. "Never!" he shouts back, "We are good people".

I gave here an account both of a non-San asking for accommodation and a group of San because both encounters were typical of Peter's interactions with people who were trying to get rooms. Peter very rarely gave rooms to people belonging to the Army or the government in general unless he knew them personally and they had politely booked in advance and were paying a premium. In fact, trying to get a room at Maori, unless you knew the owners, was often somewhat of a roulette game in terms how you were greeted. Peter ran the allocation of rooms and the bookings entirely by himself. When his wife tried to get involved or help, Peter would often get angry and accuse her of not

understanding his system. He argued, that his system was largely based on getting as many people as possible for each room so he could charge them more. However, observing how he granted and denied rooms made the process appear much more complex and nebulous than this.

San, however, whether !Kung from Grasshoek or Ju|'hoansi from Tsumkwe, were consistently welcome. Almost every time, the San and Peter would greet each other with "Yo, Bushman". Using the same language he used when actually turning people away because he did not want their kind (army, cell phone users, people who caught him on the wrong day) meant something entirely different when talking to the San. What was serious with most people was playful banter with the Ju|'hoansi. To go even further, he would make room for San people if the guest houses were fully booked – for example by letting them use the guest room between the Garage and his own house, a privilege normally granted only to friends or family. The words exchanged are similar in both situations. However, in one context they are meant seriously, in the other context playfully.

The next morning I ventured to the reception area to have coffee and meet Connie to drive into the Township. Going to the kitchen, I passed Peter and one of the Ju|'hoansi from the night before sitting at a table with crafted items strewn out between them - Bracelets, mobiles, games, key rings and other souvenirs.

"And what is this?" Peter asks holding up one of the mobiles.

*You hang it off a tree or a door*

"And then? Is magic?"

*No, it's just pretty.*

"Hm... how much?"

*50 for one.*

"You are crazy. What is this? Who will buy it? ten Dollars!"

*Ten Dollars is too little. It takes three days to make it.*

"Three days? That's because Bushmen are lazy. I make you this in one hour."



The man starts to defend his product by explaining the detailed carving process.

*Ach, no. I cannot pay 50 Dollars for something that is only going to sit in the shop. I'm sorry. You must either sell to someone else or give me better price.*

“Hm...” The man seems not too happy.

“This one” Peter reaches for a miniature bow and arrow (a Van der Post-ian Love Bow) with miniature fire sticks.

*This is great. This is a real Bushman thing. People see and know, ‘oh yes, it’s from the tiny people who make fire’*

He starts mimicking a Bushman making fire with tiny sticks “ooooooh, me make fire!” Both start laughing as he takes other items from the table which he thinks will sell well and uses them to caricaturise the San.

In the end, Peter takes everything the trader brought for close to the price he asked for it but gives him a list of what he should bring less off or more of next time. After Peter pays him the money the man buys a beer for Peter and himself from Peter’s bar.

Two things need to be mentioned here. Firstly, the mere use of the word ‘Bushman’ in the accusatory tone Peter employs would normally be considered extremely offensive in Tsumkwe or Nyae Nyae. The way Peter grimaces and gesticulates while he talks about San clearly suggests that ‘Bushmen’ here denotes someone primitive and stupid. While this is not to say that this is necessarily what Peter really thinks, he often speaks to San in a way that insinuates he is talking to someone he considers far below him.

Paradoxically, what does not translate well into written words are the subtle dynamics of their negotiation. While his constant use of the word Bushman, his mimicking and caricaturing are ostensibly racist, there is a tenderness in the interaction.

When I mentioned Peter to researchers in Tsumkwe, many commented by branding him a “horrible racist” or “a terrible, terrible man”. One told me of an instance when her and Joel travelled to Maori.

*As we got out of the car he just yelled 'no Bushmen allowed'. When I told him it was inappropriate to use that words and that they prefer the term 'San' or 'Ju|'hoansi', he became very rude and I decided we should leave.*

“Wow”, I replied. “What did Joel say to all this?”

*I did not want to discuss it with him. He seemed very embarrassed.*

I cannot say for certain why Joel, in the situation of being greeted by Peter with racist slurs and watching an American researcher scold Peter, seemed embarrassed. I have, however, seen Joel interact with Peter happily returning his racist jokes. By the end of this chapter, I hope to have shown that whatever the American researcher understood as embarrassment at Peter's offensive words may actually be grounded in a more subtle interaction.

## Making Fun of Bushmen

If we interpret the relationship between Peter and the San from the vantage point of the opinion expressed by the researcher above, we might find that the it is shaped and defined by a hierarchical power dynamic.

According to 'Superiority Theory', to be allowed to laugh at someone implies power over that person (Morreall, 1987). After all, Peter is in a much higher position of power than the San who visit him. He is White, he owns a large area of land, employs staff and has significantly more money than any Ju|'hoansi from Tsumkwe. More specifically, however, the Ju|'hoansi depend on Peter to sell their crafts.

Selling crafts, that is, largely traditional necklaces and bracelets, miniature bows and arrows and bags, is the only available source of income for many San women. While some might try to sell to tourists directly, the market for this is not big enough and they depend on traders to buy their crafts in order to sell it on in other parts of Namibia and internationally.

This is where Peter comes in. He runs a shop of Namibian (and African) curiosities from his campsite which he opens especially for particular tourists and uses a variety of finely honed sales tactics to sell them as much as possible. Opportunities to sell directly to

shops in large quantities are rare, so being able to sell to Peter is in many cases directly important to San securing an income.

Could it be, then, that the San only play along with his bizarre display of racist humour in order to secure access to Peter's shop? Are the San actively demeaning themselves and their cultural identity in order to seduce business advantages out of Peter? Further, if this is the case, is Peter purely motivated by wanting to feel superior and is acting out a sadistic script to humiliate them?

When asking the Ju|'hoansi about Peter, their assessment is very different from that of many White people. Terms used by the San to describe Peter were "crazy, but good crazy" or "a good person" or – most often – "a very funny guy". Critics of Peter's conduct rarely get further in their engagement with him than the point at which he calls the San "Bushmen" in an ostensibly degrading way. In fact, however, greeting each other with 'Yo Bushman' is something the San commonly do amongst each other, particularly among those who have a lot of contact with non-San. While the word is not actually presented as universally objectionable – many Ju|'hoansi prefer the term Bushmen to San – the way it is intoned in 'Yo, Bushman' implies that it is meant as a derogatory term.

It is certainly possible that power plays some part in how the social interaction between Peter and the San unfold. However, I am interested in another possible avenue of interpretation. After noticing the way in which racist peer-to-peer humour was common among some Ju|'hoansi in the form of calling each other 'Bushman' I asked why. The only answer I ever got to my question was this:

*I don't know, it's just funny.*

The anthropology, sociology and psychology of humour tells us that humour is anything but 'just' funny. Humour enacts power relations, addresses inequalities, causes and smooths social ruptures, can be used as a weapon or a tool of de-escalation (Redmond, 2008; Swinkels & de Koning, 2016; Carty & Musharbash, 2008). I argue that, while many of those components apply here, racist humour in this particular instance is used as way to create a space outside the otherwise densely loaded context of identity politics and different expectations having to be met – a space where something can, in fact, be experienced to be "just funny".

## THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY

To take a closer look at the potential for anti-San racist humour to be ‘just funny’, I am going to briefly turn my attention to the most popular and successful artefact of this phenomenon.

With a narrative triggered and continuously aided by the story of a naïve Bushman who accidentally stumbles into the modern world, *The Gods must be crazy*, a 1980s South African comedy by Jamie Uys, illustrates well the complexities of this humour. Even though it is more than 30 years old, the film is still very much present in Tsumkwe, where some of it was shot and the San actor who stars in the film moved to retire.

To raise funds for CEDU, some tentative team members and chief Bobo met up to shoot a promotional video for the project which would be available on the online fundraising page. A script had been drafted by the group beforehand, dividing up statements between the group members and the chief about why the project was important.

At the CEDU construction site – a roughly 200 m<sup>2</sup> clearing in the bush with two trees casting shade over the South West quarter – the group, consisting of Fisser, George, Joel, Nai, Boyscout and Chief Bobo sat in a half circle under one of the trees.

The first shot showed a close-up of Nai as she said :

*≠Xaisi! My name is Nai and I am a Kalahari San, also known as Bushmen.*

At this point, the camera moved to a wider shot, revealing the whole group.

“Wait, what is my text?” Boyscout asks.

Joel is quick to respond “You may remember us from films such as *The Gods must be crazy!*”

George, silent, picks up a half empty coke bottle which is among the clutter in front of him and hits Boyscout (gently) over the head, giggling to himself. Nai starts laughing loudly. At this moment, Joel is struck by an idea. He takes the coke bottle, drinks the remainder of Coca Cola inside it and climbs up the tree. As he reaches a branch above the group he exclaims: “I am an aeroplane!”

We decide to do a second take and this time have Nai say the line about *The Gods must be Crazy*.

*≠Xaisi! My name is Nai. I am an indigenous Kalahari San, sometimes called 'Bushman'*

The camera zooms out to reveal part of the group and the sandy ground in front of her.

An empty coke bottle falls into the frame from overhead and lands right in front of Nai. For a second, nobody reacts. Then, Nai and George burst out laughing hysterically, moments later joined by the rest of the group.

Catching his breath, George turns towards me: "Ce du, CEDU girl!"<sup>21</sup>

He giggles at his joke, takes the bottle, and very carefully throws it back up for Joel in the tree to catch it. Not catching something one is being thrown is a bad indication for a relationship between two people for the Ju|'hoansi.

The premise of 1980's South African slapstick *comedy The God's must be crazy* is Bushman Xi's attempt to return a bottle of coke, which has fallen out of the Sky, back to the Gods. The Coke bottle is presented as a catalyst, which, after being thrown out of an airplane, throws the blissful and innocent existence of the "Dainty Bushmen" out of balance. On his way to 'return' the bottle, Xi gets mixed up in a fight between rebels and a somewhat nondescript but incompetent African government and the love triangle between a blonde macho Boer, a teacher from Cape Town, and an awkward scientist. Hilarity ensues.

The film was exceptionally successful internationally – some sources claiming it has been the most successful South African film of all time - and was for a long time the most successful international film in the US.

In Tsumkwe, where the movie was shot and where the actor who portrays the film's Bushman bought one of the few stone houses from what he was paid for his work, the film is very well known. The vast majority of Ju|'hoansi people I spoke to had seen it, most of

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<sup>21</sup> Ce du translates to doing something over, to do something again but this time hopefully better. Since it also has connotations of reversal, CEDU was chosen as the name for the indigenous filmmaking project. George called me and sometimes other people involved in CEDU, CEDU girl or CEDU boy.


them several times. Unanimously, it seems, they, like the 1980s US audience, found it hilarious.

The difficulty with talking about *The Gods must be crazy* is that it is not entirely clear who the racist humour of the film is directed at. Ostensibly, Xi's character, the childlike, innocent Bushman, unspoiled by corrupt society, provides a way for the viewer to see that it is actually 'civilised' society which is ridiculous. His eyes, full of silent wonder, serve as a commentary on the bizarre things he witnesses.

★★★★★

No other film I ever saw has been able to show, so well, that "civilized" man lives in TOO COMPLEX A WORLD.. the bushmen have it ok.. technology is not needed, al these SURPLUS HUMANS THAT COVER THE GLOBE ARE NOT NEEDED! ABANDON YOUR TECHNOLOGY!...


[More](#)



Cassandra Maples  
★ Super Reviewer

★★★★★

over-the-top, amazing, clever, but above all hilarious analysis of our humanity. The curious and naive bushman N!xau effortlessly steals the show. one of my childhood favorites.



Pierluigi Puccini  
★ Super Reviewer

 delightfully entertaining

November 8, 2004 | Rating: 4/5



Rich Cline  
Shadows on the Wall

 There's an earnest sincerity to the messages offered within, plus the presentation is colorful and exotic and quite funny throughout.

May 17, 2004 | Rating: 4/5 | [Full Review...](#)



Scott Weinberg  
eFilmCritic.com

 It's not hard to understand why the film was such a worldwide sensation...

March 16, 2004 | Rating: 2.5/4 | [Full Review...](#)



David Nusair  
Reel Film Reviews

 an offbeat movie that is also brilliant

February 8, 2004 | Rating: 4/5 | [Full Review...](#)



David Bezanson  
Filmcritic.com

 A slapstick comedy that really works!

July 23, 2003 | [Full Review...](#)



Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat  
Spirituality and Practice

 Whimsical mix of African folk tale and slapstick comedy

May 15, 2003 | Rating: 3/5



Rob Thomas  
Capital Times (Madison, WI)

 There's Uys' penchant for very broad Jerry Lewis-like slapstick, and your enjoyment of that depends entirely on your penchant for said slapstick.

May 12, 2003 | Rating: 3.5/5 | [Full Review...](#)



Ken Hanke  
Mountain Xpress (Asheville, NC)

 You'd have to be crazy not to be charmed by this movie - grab a coke and a smile.

August 9, 2002 | Rating: 4/5



Cherryl Dawson and Leigh Ann Palone  
TheMovieChicks.com

It was not until 1985 that critical reviews of the film started to emerge, questioning its analysis as a film which managed to celebrate indigeneity in a wildly popular film:

By the time we finally saw the movie, I had heard only one negative review of the film. And that, in part is why the movie shocked me. I could understand the appeal of the film to children and bigots, but it slowly became apparent that the intellectual community was rationalizing its enjoyment of the film by claiming to be laughing at itself (Hunter, 1985, p. 35)

Two other brief reviews from 1985 point towards the fact that those described by the film as “the most contented people on earth” as well as South Africa itself were actually part of a very complex, problematic and conflict-prone political environment. Moss (1985) sees the following parallel:

The government that is attacked is Black run, but woefully inept. [...]. The terrorists are also black, but they are led by an un-identifiable non-white. They, too are incredibly inept, and obsessed with playing cards. We are told that this attempted coup takes place “2000 miles North” of the Kalahari Desert. This location just happens to be Angola. The fact that the South African government is presently fighting Angolan soldiers, who are aided by Cubans, makes the inferences all the more insidious. (Moss, 1985, p. 6)

Volkman, also in 1985, sees an even more direct parallel:

The metaphor is all too clear. The guerrillas are SWAPO, the Southwest African People’s organisation [...] Xi represents the Bushmen who are now being recruited by the South African Defense Force [...] to counter the Namibian independence movement. The episode replicates in perfect miniature the political reality. What is insidious is that it makes us laugh. (Volkman, 1985, p. 483)

Volkman also explains that the Bushmen in Tsumkwe are far from living in “Bushman Paradise”. In fact, at the time when *The Gods must be Crazy* was filmed, living conditions in Tsumkwe were deplorable. In the 1980s, Tsumkwe was the only place to reliably get water in the entire Nyae Nyae region. This was the result of ‘Bushmanland’ having been down-sized and no longer including any permanent bodies of water. Since then, water pumps have been installed, allowing small villages to be re-established. Tuberculosis and alcoholism affected the population even more heavily than today due to the drastic

population increase which came with San from all over South Africa being relocated to Apartheid Bushmanland (See Chapter Two). People in Tsumkwe had no source of income. The possibility of helping them establish cattle rearing was being heavily debated among different NGOs (see Chapter Two). At the same time, in the struggle for Namibian independence, South Africa recruited many San for their tracking skills and ability to withstand the trials of being in the bush. What millions of viewers in South Africa and around the Globe laughed at and found light entertainment in was actually rooted in political power struggles and racism experienced by people who had been disenfranchised by their government (Lee, 1986).

Bearing all this in mind, the question remains why the Ju|'hoansi find the film funny. Why do they partake in this racist exercise, both with regards to the film and Peter's jokes?

Johns, reviewing the impact of *The Gods must be Crazy* in 2009 argues that the film is not merely turning a blind eye to the socio-political realities of South Africa. Rather, he argues, the film can in fact be considered a piece of Apartheid propaganda which serves to reinforce racial stereotypes and where the state imagines non-White people's proper place in society to be. Black people are unanimously portrayed as incapable by the film and at the same time shown to overstep their station (Johns, 2009).

The San, on the other hand, who are presented as living a peaceful simple life far away from everything, not attempting to meddle with the government, are an acceptable form of non-White subjects. True to their status as not quite human they do not concern themselves with the complications of what is going on. The film is successful in establishing and cementing a stereotype of San which is still a powerful element in the landscape of San imagery today (see Chapter Two). Visiting researchers I asked about the film seemed to largely dislike it for that very reason.

*I think it [The Gods must be crazy] is terrible. I think it's done terrible things to the San and still is doing terrible things. But they think it's great, so what can you do..... [anon. 84]*

Hunter (1985) claims that only children and bigots could enjoy the film. The implication is that the film is only funny to those who are unaware of racialized hierarchies and what happened in South Africa and Tsumkwe at the time.



Why then, do the San laugh both at *The Gods must be crazy* and participate in Peter's racist jokes? If the basis of their partaking in racist humour was because of power dynamics forcing their compliance, why would they continue the racist humour when no one more powerful was around instigating it, as some of them do when they call each other 'Yo, Bushman'? Power, thus, seems not a satisfactory explanation. When I discussed this question with a variety of Non-San Namibians during my fieldwork, one of the explanations offered was that "they just don't know any better" or that "they just do not understand" the politically charged nature of this kind of humour.

My ethnographic data throughout this thesis shows that the Ju|'hoansi are keenly aware of their image and of how their image is being used abroad. If, as I discuss, they are aware of the varying expectations of tourists, researchers and NGOs, and depend on gauging their reactions to certain performances of culture correctly, it would be surprising if they were not aware of the racist humour in *The Gods must be Crazy*.

This was in fact evident when George discussed the film with tourists. Often, tourists, especially from the US or South Africa, would refer to the film and ask him whether the San in Tsumkwe were the same kind of Bushmen. George would then explain that while the Ju|'hoansi in Tsumkwe were in fact the very same people as the Bushmen in the film, the San actually considered the film problematic. "It's not a good presentation of the San." He explains.

"Usually I leave it at that" he explains when I ask him about this many months later.

*They don't want to hear too much criticism of the movie but I think it is important to tell people that there are some problems with it.*

## CONTEXT MATTERS

The difference between George's response to the tourists and his enjoyment and joking about the film earlier gives us an important clue with regards to how to interpret the racist jokes. When it comes to humour, context matters. More precisely, who you are joking with matters. As Ford and Ferguson (2004) have shown, racist humour reinforces existing racist notions. Racist jokes do not make new racists, but they do reinforce existing racism.

Returning to Peter's caricatures of Bushmen and the San's complicity in them, it is important to emphasise that, while Peter provides an extreme example, it was not the only

time I witnessed interactions like this. Mostly, the people who the Ju/'hoansi engaged in these conversations with, were outsiders in their own right.

Fran, an NGO health worker was another such example. Originally from the US, but having spent more than a decade in Southern Africa, fellow Americans were often surprised and shocked by how she spoke to San. She would often, for instance, say that San did not know what soap was or that they were too stupid to understand that they needed to treat their Tuberculosis.

However, this behaviour only occurred with individuals whom she knew well and had built up rapport with. When I asked her why she treated some Ju/'hoansi differently, she said the following:

*Well, some of them I have known for a long time, so we joke around, you know. But only when I see them on the street or at the shop or something. Not at work.... At least not when I am seeing them about a serious health issue.... It's just joking around, we are building a bond. (Fran, 53)*

Interactions where San were caricaturised were extremely dependent on who was present. Alf had moved to Namibia when it first became independent and worked as a mechanic on a variety of projects, both for the government and NGOs. This line of work often brought him into the Nyae Nyae region where he would spend a lot of time living in a campervan and for several years he lived on and off in a Ju/'hoan village. He had met his wife, a Ju/'hoan woman while he was living in the Kalahari and had had four children with her. They now lived comfortably on the outskirts of Grootfontein. I made observations about his attitude towards San people in three different settings.

The first setting was at his house, with his oldest son present and a group of visitors. In this situation, the interaction between Alf and both his Ju/'hoansi visitors and his son, was similar to the interaction between Peter and the Ju/'hoansi. He ridiculed his son in particular, and San in general, for being able to run as fast as animals but being extremely lazy at the same time.

When he was alone with his children and his wife, on the other hand, I did not witness him being ostensibly racist. Rather, he interacted with them in a similar tone as he did with other White Namibians.

However, on an occasion where some German friends were visiting and his Ju|'hoan family was not present, Alf made several racist remarks about having to discipline his children in a particular way to fight against the 'lazy Bushman genes'. Those remarks had none of the playful tone displayed in the first setting where his son and other Ju|'hoan friends were present. What he said about his children in the company of German friends seemed to stem from sincere beliefs. This illustrates a point I will return to further below. Simply because the purpose of racist humour may be to create a space where power relations and pressures are alleviated, does not in fact mean that they are not present.

As we can see from the ethnographic examples above, the Ju|'hoansi are selective about who they participate in racist humour with. While they do certainly do this with Peter, they do not necessarily share this humour with many other Non-San. While they may laugh about *the Gods must be crazy* in a more private context, they are more careful in a more public sphere. Before I give a final ethnographic example in order to further consider who the Ju|'hoansi decide to forge these relationships with, I would like to summarise my hypothesis regarding what happens socially during this exercise of humour.

#### HUMOUROUS PLAY AS PRESSURE VALVES

One way to start thinking about the use of defamatory labels by those the label is applied to is by understanding it as an act of re-appropriation. People of a stigmatised<sup>22</sup> group can attempt to change the meaning of the term used to stigmatise them in order to change the 'consensual value' (Galinski, et al., 2003) of their group. An example for this are Afro-Americans re-appropriating the word 'nigger'. The intention is to "cleanse the word of its negative connotations so that racists can no longer use it to hurt blacks" (Hutchison, 2001, p. 1 cited in Galinski, et al., 2003, p. 231). Other examples, according to Galinski, include the transformation of the word "queer" for gay people, having been used as a defamatory term initially and become a positive terms to identify with (Galinski, et al., 2003, p. 231).

It is worth considering how much this concept plays a role in the context of Ju|'hoansi usage of the term 'Bushman'. Boyscout, when asked about his usage of the term had this to say:

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<sup>22</sup> Labelled as lesser than human (Goffman 1963)

*It's good to use the word because it is not going away so we have to make it something positive.*

However, this was an isolated case. Overall, there seemed to be no systematic movement of intentionally transforming the term. To the contrary, one of my findings was, as explored earlier in this thesis, that Ju/'hoansi intentionally gave into externally constructed labels. While some, like Boy Scout, may have felt that terminology should be addressed from the ground up, this was certainly not a universally expressed desire or concern. However, being socially creative with labels that assign group value (Galinski, et al., 2003, p. 228) is an important notion in further trying to understand the processes here.

Another important element when looking at patterns of joking about San images, is that the Ju/'hoansi are well known for their joking relationships (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940) which are forged between individuals based on a complex set of rules which divides relations into joking and non-joking relationships (Marshall, 1957, p. 22). Thus, there are known circumstances among the Ju/'hoansi to have humorous situations which facilitate freedom from conventional social rules and other pressures. I argue that incidents of racist humour are created as outlets for pressure related to San identity.

Through practising racist humour, the Ju/'hoansi mark out a moment as free of the usual socio-politic demands and tensions. By being explicitly racist, a space is created in which the complex identity politics and power relations are denied, effectively levelling the playing field. In a way, if a Ju/'hoan jokes about the Bushmen, then Peter's jokes cannot harm him. While this still bears a relationship to power relations in the sense that the humour is born out of a necessity to deal with inequalities, its effect is one of levelling, rather than reinforcing hierarchies. It is interesting to note that in this way, racist humour might be related to levelling techniques after all, albeit in a reversed form where, by making fun of oneself, the other person is obliged to join the humorous sociality and come down to the same level as the instigator.

At this point, I would like to suggest thinking of the ethnographic examples I gave not only as instances of humour, but also as *play*. Play, according to Sennett, is used to experiment with social rules of identity in a secluded space in which rules can be adjusted for the purpose of play (Sennett, 1974, p. 319). This serves as practise for the performance

of roles in 'real life' but can also be a response to frustrations in the real world, providing a space where the social fabric can be experimented and played with.

I believe we can think of some of the instances of racist humour as play. This play provides a chance for self-distancing away from the pressures normally felt in daily life through both San sociality and the expectations of outsiders.

Humour is important here. It signifies the interaction as a space of play which all sides are willing to participate in. The fact that racist terms are not treated as harmful and offensive, but rather "just funny" in this space, indicates that the rules of normal day to day life are suspended and do not apply here. Orwell writes that "Whatever is funny is subversive" and that a joke is not, of course,

a serious attack upon morality, but it is a sort of mental rebellion, a momentary wish that things were otherwise. (Orwell, 1941)

It is in this space of racist humour, where the participants perhaps wish it was otherwise, that they can, in a way, be free from themselves and the inequalities between each other.

Importantly, as Sennett argues, "this freedom can be created only by rules which will establish the fiction of initial equality in power between the players" (1974, p. 319). In the case of racist humour here, this is achieved by all players, regardless of their actual power position, to laugh together.

Like children have to spend time establishing rules for play, the process of vetting each other for this kind of interaction can take a long time. Where I observed San and non-San using racist tropes to create an 'outside' space, the people involved had known each other for a long time. Similarly, the 'real world-suspending' qualities of this play are fragile. Like a game being spoilt as soon as one person cheats (Sennett, 1974, p. 321) the phenomenon at hand breaks down as soon as someone uninitiated tries to get involved. When a visiting researcher, for example, tells Peter that his terminology is racist and inappropriate, as I described in an ethnographic example earlier, the 'outside' space is not established.

Racist humour, both internal and with outsiders, allows the Ju|'hoansi a temporary disassociation from their San identity and the power of the images it is normally associated with. In this temporary space they can, for example, share a beer with a German eccentric without the situation being socially loaded and questions of authenticity hanging in the air.

This technique of using humorous play to create ‘outside’ spaces, perhaps, is the meaning of ‘just funny’. It explains why people who told me that incidents of racist humour I asked about were “just funny” often seemed to do so in a tone that suggested exasperation with the question. Where normally people were very much aware of my role as an anthropologist and the kind of reflexive answers that were useful to me, ‘just funny’ seemed to not be part of the body of San identity that was readily discussed and explained.

Creating this safe environment through racism, was only done by particular people with particular people. To participate in this kind of humour as a Ju|’hoansi, seemed to require experience and knowledge of how San identity was imagined and perceived. This assertion is based on the observation that I only saw this humour being successfully performed by people with experience in dealing with non-San and those who were well established in their communities.

Who the humour was performed with, was a very precarious matter. I believe that Peter’s position as someone who, by the assessment of his own wife, was not taken seriously by his own society was significant. His being an outsider from his own social environment qualified him to take part in the ‘outside’ created through the racist jokes. The account of the researcher who was with Joel when Peter greeted him with his usual greeting supports this. Her pointing out that ‘Bushman’ was a racist term changed the ‘outside’ space into a loaded situation. Moreover, I believe it was her interference as someone who was part of a larger social group connected to the Ju|’hoansi through research and NGOs that made her unsuitable for this kind of humorous exchange and stopped the jokes in their tracks. “It’s only with some individuals that you can joke like this” Joel explained. “You have to know them for a long time”.

#### THE FIRST TOURIST

In the final ethnographic example of this chapter I want to extend the argument I made for racist humour to disparaging humour generally in an instance where the outsider is the one being made fun of.

One particular joke followed me throughout my fieldwork. To fully portray this joke, I have to refer back to some of the first ethnographic descriptions of this thesis: to Nhoma and Christoph, the self-labelled tourist who had been visiting the village regularly for the last 15 years and forged lasting friendships.

When Christoph introduced himself or had to explain his presence in Tsumkwe or his relationship with Nhoma in general, he would usually start by saying “I was the first tourist in Nhoma”. Then, he would usually talk about how things had changed since then or his first impressions. Whatever the particular subject of the conversation, Christoph would start with his being the first tourist in Nhoma.

This overture had brought about many conversations over the last 15 years, and particularly his Ju|’hoan friends had heard it many times. At some point, somehow, the remark turned into a joke. According to Christoph it was “probably Joel” who started it, asking one day “So, Christoph, I hear you were the first tourist in Nhoma?” to which Christoph, somehow, appropriately responded with laughter. Ever since then, they would make this joke occasionally. Either Christoph would say “Did you know that I was the first tourist in Nhoma” or one of the Ju|’hoansi would say it. Both Christoph and the people from Nhoma thought this was hilarious.

My initial thoughts were that the Ju|’hoansi were using this joke to make fun of Christoph and his recurrent use of the phrase. However, the close relationship Christoph had with several of the people from Nhoma made this unlikely. The way that Joel, the main perpetrator of this joke frequently and genuinely expressed his appreciation for Christoph and spent time with him reminiscing about the past and exchanging stories suggested a relationship which would have stood in stark contrast to a joke that subtly and naggingly makes fun of the other person. Also, why then would Christoph have been complicit in the joke?

My second theory, that this was part of a joking levelling technique – as discussed in the previous chapter – was not entirely convincing either. Christoph and Joel did make jokes about each other. But most of the time those focussed on either Joel’s promiscuity or Christoph’s weight.

The “Did you know Christoph was the first tourist in Nhoma” line on the other hand seemed to occur in specific situations. While jokes as part of levelling techniques could occur at any time in any context, this joke only came up when it was related to the subject that was being discussed among Ju|’hoansi, particularly when tourism, social change or wildlife protection and conservation was discussed.

Throughout most of my fieldwork I continued to not understand this joke and had to simply accept that everybody else somehow thought it was hilarious. Finally, about ten

months into my fieldwork, I was included in the joke. I had asked Joel how long Nhoma had been where it was. In a non-joking tone Joel suggested I ask Christoph because he would know exactly. He then looked at me as if making a judgement and almost hesitantly added: “Did you know that Christoph was the first tourist in Nhoma?”. To his visible relief, I laughed.

Joel’s hesitation in sharing this joke with me indicates, I believe, the precarious nature of what the joke does. Even though it might appear so from the outside, the content of the joke is anything but light hearted. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Christoph feels guilty for introducing tourism to the village of Nhoma. To the people of Nhoma, like Joel, the subject of tourism was one fraught with complex pressures. While they were happy about the high number of tourists visiting them during the winter, they struggled with a lack of privacy because they had no separate museum and living villages but only one big village which tourists had free range of during their visits. They also, as discussed in Chapter Two, suffered from the problematic relationship with Arno who managed the tourism business. Overall, tourism, while necessary for survival, was intimately connected with social pressures.

Being a tourist, especially in the situations in which the joke was made, was by all parties recognised to be something problematic. On the other hand, the people of Nhoma never suggested in the slightest that Christoph was actually to blame for the tourism situation. Rather, when they talked to Christoph about tourists it would be in a way that made it clear that Christoph was not included in this category. Through the repeated inside joke, Christoph was marked out as an exception to the tourist. His ostensible association with the tourism industry was acknowledged while simultaneously carving out a space for him in a social space where him and the Ju|’hoansi could meet outside of the burdening association with tourism.

## Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter, that in order to escape pressures brought about by expectations based on San identity – such as performance expectations from tourists and sharing expectations from other Ju|’hoansi – some of the people of Tsumkwe create social spaces which allow them to disassociate from the Pre-Archive of San images and all its



connected issues through humorous play. I have shown that this humour is somewhat related to, but not the same as, the levelling techniques which were discussed in the previous chapter.

Where levelling techniques typically use disparaging humour to bring the other person down, the humour-based interactions I describe here function differently. By making fun of oneself, the other person is invited to join the 'outside' space. The phenomenon I describe in this chapter further differs from levelling techniques in their purpose. While Levelling mechanisms maintain an egalitarian social order, humorous play creates a temporal space where one can engage with the wish that things (socio-economic situation, outside pressures, power relations) were different.

I have also shown, that this kind of humorous play hinges on long established and carefully negotiated relationships, as well as a mastery of the pre-archival space and San images. I have shown this by first demonstrating the need for outside spaces and using the metaphor of sand and tracking to engage with Ju|'hoansi techniques of immersion and withdrawal. Both the performance of racist humour in this context and reading tracks require extensive knowledge and experience. Reading tracks requires the hunter to have an intimate knowledge of the landscape and how everything in it – from the sand to the eland – normally acts and reacts. To create a pressure free social space, on the other hand, requires knowledge of the landscape of San imagery and how the people present are tied into it and think about it. This type of knowledge reminds of the notion of 'mastery' which I discussed with regards to ways of moving through the pre-archival space. Many of the people who use humour with outsiders as a way of creating an 'outside' space depend on extensive knowledge and understanding of Tsumkwe as a place filled with complex images for their livelihood. Where a hunter can see the paths of different animals crossing at different times all in one view, a freelance tourist and researcher guide like Joel is aware of conflicting ideas about San identity by the people around him and can act accordingly (normally by attempting to keep those people separate).

Further, both the process of reading tracks and this particular performance of humour contain an element of disassociation. In the case of reading tracks, the hunter steps back to be able to see the entire picture. He steps back not only spatially but to a degree also out of time into a vantage point from which he can see events which happened at different

times unfold simultaneously. A Ju|'hoansi participating in racist humour disassociates themselves from his usual social embeddedness in the Pre-Archive.

It is important to stress here, that the vast majority of people of Ju|'hoan, with the exception of a few women at Maori, who I have observed engaging in this behaviour, were men. Specifically, men who had acquired skills of dealing with a variety of Non-San and traversed a variety of social spheres.

This brings us to two complications with the explanatory model I presented here. Sennett shows that the experience of pressures created by a crisis of the public/private divide can lead to psychic disorders. This was the case both with the phenomenon of Hysteria in Victorian times and what Sennett considers his own culture's tendency towards narcissism (1974, p. 333). To draw a sophisticated comparison with the social climate and public/private sphere in Tsumkwe is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, the two kinds of pressure described in this chapter – through San sociality and tourist expectations – create an environment of being constantly judged based on one's adherence to a version of externally prescribed San images.

Sennett's work shows that the kind of pressures that are experienced in Tsumkwe, can have significant effects on a society. Further research could investigate whether the account I gave in the very beginning of this chapter of the “hysterical” woman might be related to this issue. As Eliza and her female cousins told me, women starting to laugh and cry for no apparent reason is not an entirely unusual sight. Whatever the specifics of what is going on there, the ways I have discussed in this chapter to release societal pressure through racist play are certainly gendered. It is largely men who are put in the situation where they can build the skills and contacts to take part in this pressure release. One might wonder, but I cannot answer this with confidence, whether there would be less women having spontaneous laughing and crying fits if women had access to the same pressure release opportunities as men.

Another issue, which my data is able to speak to more, is the fallacy of audience choice. While the Ju|'hoansi certainly select who they engage with in this way, those outsiders are often, not always, still ostensibly racist. Alf, for instance, despite having been in a successful marriage with a Ju|'hoan woman for many years, speaks in highly derivative terms of San people when he is around his German friends. He also raises his children with the underlying assumption that “they are half Bushman so they need extra discipline.

They have a natural propensity to be lazy and to not achieve anything, so I have to push them". Incidentally, his children are all highly successful with his son, for instance, competing for one of Namibia's National athletic teams.

The fact that some of the outsiders who San engage in racist humour with are, in fact, racist, does not proof the earlier mentioned claim that the reason for the San's involvement is an unawareness of the danger's of racism. A better explanation is that the seriousness of racism is suspended during racist play, provided the rules of the 'game' have been clearly established. In play, as Sennett points out, rules only create a *temporary* equality (1974, p. 319). Once the play is over, inequality, and all other aspects of experienced social pressures, resume.

Does this mean play in the form of humour which satirises social categories and identities is unsuccessful in what it aims to achieve here? If the end goal was to re-appropriate the meaning attached to San labels as they are used in everyday context, then the answer must be 'yes'. However, as the creation of a space where identity roles are temporarily suspended by way of assuming the roles that are problematic in exaggerated play, it is successful. The technique is successful in creating a space where relationships, otherwise constrained by power hierarchies and expectations, can be enjoyed; it provides a way for the Ju|'hoansi, who famously avoid confrontation at all costs, to engage and play with the very structures which frustrate them while simultaneously temporarily alleviating those pressures.

This act of disassociation is perhaps one of the most significant comments on the Kalahari debate – the question whether the San were shaped by outsiders or by themselves. The way in which the Ju|'hoansi use humour shows that ethnic identity, whether innate or externally prescribed, is not all-determining but can be navigated and stepped in and out of, at least for a while, by the individual through creative play.

In relation to the Pre-Archive, this also shows us that images, as important as they are in shaping the daily socio-economic situation of the Ju|'hoansi, do not hold absolute power. Temporarily, their power can be played with in the periphery of the Pre-Archive.

## 8. THE END

*It is almost morning,  
And yet I am sure you are not satisfied  
Of these events at full. Let us go in,  
And charge us there upon inter'gatories,  
And we will answer all things faithfully.*  
(Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 5, Scene 1,  
Shakespeare)

Throughout this thesis, I have shown that San images are powerful motivators for how relationships between Ju|'hoansi and outsiders play out. These images exist in multiplicity. Despite ongoing attempts from filmmakers, tourists, writers, and, not least of all, anthropologists they resist being captured in a singular image of what it means to be San. Instead, Ju|'hoansi are comfortable inside ambiguity and a multiplicity of truths about their identity.

As I alluded to in Chapter One, this ambiguity and multiplicity is a quality of images generally which non-San often experience as somewhat dangerous if not controlled, framed and put into structures. The structures and boundaries we place on images, however, are not all powerful. As I show in Chapter Five, Ju|'hoansi can traverse, and in some instances break down, these boundaries through the mastery of Trickster-like conceptual movement. In Chapter Six, I show that egalitarian San sociality is able to prevent the competing images from being put into a hegemonic truth. Chapter Seven, finally, shows that these structures may even be temporarily vacated through the masterful use of play. In these ways, Ju|'hoansi prevent outsiders from gaining control over these powerful images.

As I will explore further below, tendencies to view the San as ‘extinct’ or ‘vanishing’ may be an attempt to take agency over those images away from the San and bring them under ‘our’ (non-San) control. In the spirit of this multiplicity and ambiguity for which I argue throughout this thesis, it seems hypocritical to offer any concluding remarks. Nonetheless, in ending this account of my anthropological research, I must present a conclusion.

This paradox, of course, brings to mind Michael Lambek’s famous last sentence in *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte* (1993): “In conclusion, inconclusion”.

However, while Lambek’s iconic statement is certainly apt, my goal in this concluding chapter is to not only reiterate ambiguity, but to offer some thoughts on how my findings, although ambiguous, may comment on larger themes of San images productively. What I would like to use as a framework for this conclusion is an argument made by Richard Meek in an article entitled *The Promise of Satisfaction: Shakespeare’s Oral Endings*. Meek argues that oral summarising accounts given at the end of many of Shakespeare’s plays “serve as both recapitulation *and* continuation of the play’s event” (2007, p. 249). The telling of an ending invites the imagining of a future.

To use Shakespeare’s practise of ending his plays as a framework for a thesis about how Ju|’hoansi inhabit images may seem counterintuitive at first; but Meek’s argument rests on his understanding the format of these concluding remarks as an interaction between oral and written culture. The play, composed and written down in verse, invites the audience to imagine the conversation that is about to happen after the play is finished, where the characters tie up loose ends, and answer all remaining questions. However, this imagined conversation does not materialise inside the play, it has to materialise in the audience’s imagination. As explored in Chapter Four, the interaction between oral - that is to say somewhat intangible and re-creative - and written records is at the heart of the space within which my ethnography is set. It is only fitting then, that my conclusion, like Shakespeare’s plays, honours both ways of sense-making. For this purpose, this conclusion is split into two parts; a summary and imagined futures. In the first part, after giving a concluding summary of what I have argued throughout the previous chapters, I comment on some of my thesis’ limitations and potential avenues for future research. The second part is somewhat more challenging, since I cannot simply invite the reader to imagine how the events would resolve ‘offstage’ but need to offer some anthropological

insight. So, instead I explore how the phenomenon of San being imagined as being on the brink of extinction stands in relation to imagined futures.

## Part 1: The conclusion proper

At its very core, this thesis explores how Ju/'hoansi deal with images of San-ness being assessed as either 'real' or 'inauthentic'. What I have found is that while the social environment of Tsumkwe and the pressure the inhabitants of Nyae Nyae are subject to is very much defined by external – that is to say non-San – understandings of who the San are or should be, those categories are not inherently meaningful to Ju/'hoansi. Rather, San-ness exists in the context in which it is expressed and can be subject to fluid change. For instance, dances for tourists and dances done for the purpose of healing are not pitched against one another with regards to which one is more valuable or more 'true'. By putting images at the centre of my theoretical framework, I explicitly move away from the dichotomy of 'fake' versus 'real', found in popular discourse about San and the dichotomy of 'marginalised underclass' versus 'isolated hunter-gatherers' as it emerges in the Kalahari Debate (see Chapter One). Speaking about images and the fluid archives in which they are organised, allowed me to explore how both Ju/'hoansi and non-San position themselves in relation to a variety of ideas about San in Tsumkwe and how this contributes to an ongoing re-production of San images.

In order to provide some snapshots of existing archives of San images I began this thesis with an overview of how the San have been imagined historically. Due to the chronology of the examples I give, I might be giving the impression that a smooth transition underlies these changing images. A narrative might be constructed that looks at San images moving from a status of 'not quite human' and undeveloped to being romanticised as having a better connection to nature and being in the possession of wisdoms long lost to us. Of course, as I explain in chapter Two, actually suggesting that there is a smooth transition connecting the many different images of the San would be fallacious – A notion shared by Stuart Douglas when he says:

There is no necessary single history or unified timeline across the three modalities of “ignoble savagery”, “noble savagery”, and “worldly nativeness” (Gordon & Sholto-Douglas, 2000, p. xiv)

Douglas picks a slightly different, and perhaps more concise selection of images than I do in Chapter Two, but the sentiment is the same nonetheless. What I explicitly add, is that not only is the history of the images non-linear and chaotic, but remnants - and morphed combinations of remnants - of those images still wield power today. Some of these images may be more popular than others, for example the image of San as children of nature which I show throughout this thesis is echoed by many of the ‘outsiders’ in Tsumkwe. However, even images which one might assume no longer inform views of the San, such as the specifics of the female San body shape, might still pop up unexpectedly in the actions of visitors.

Much like it is proverbially impossible to delete a picture once it has been uploaded to the internet, so do images of exotic others persist once they have been expressed. What I began my thesis with, thus, was the argument that the Ju|’hoansi live in a world which is saturated by externally defined images of their identity.

Taking inspiration from the cinematic concept of *mise-en-scène*, I then gave an ethnographic account of my arrival in the field, consisting of the particular images my own experience had created. I wanted to emphasise that even though, upon studying the history of knowledge production about the San, one might enter Nyae Nyae with a theoretical understanding of how these images relate to one another, things are always more complicated in the context of lived experience. Apart from providing ethnographic context for the rest of my thesis, chapter Three is meant to illustrate that, by ‘outside’ standards, things do not always make sense in Tsumkwe.

Having set up the thesis with a double bill of unwieldiness and confusion, Chapter Four and Five give insight into the intricacies of how image archives are created, maintained, and inhabited. I begin dissolving categories of ‘real’ and ‘fake’, by comparing Tsumkwe to the film set of TV show *Vikings*. I chose this comparison for two reasons. Firstly, the comparison came initially from the participants of one of the film workshops and was part of a considered argument made by the participants. To not include this in my thesis would have been disingenuous.

Furthermore, however, the comparison not only helps us think about Tsumkwe as a space of the imagination but it also helps to reframe the issue of San identity as one that is not inherent to the Ju|'hoansi alone but deeply related to the way Euro-Americans imagine their own origin. Both Vikings and the San, as imagined representatives of the Stone Age, are interesting to outsiders because we associate them with a particular realm of mystery; a time that sits between myth and history; a time of just before. This time is so appealing because we have some indication of it, yet there is little concrete knowledge.

To be able to talk meaningfully about this phenomenon, I introduce the notion of the pre-Archive, a space which so little is concretely known about that it has not been successfully sorted into a coherent archive of history. Instead, in this space knowledge is transmitted through performance, images and storytelling, resulting in an environment that allows for an unproblematic multiplicity of truths. With regards to the question of what it is like to be a Ju|'hoansi in Tsumkwe, Chapter Four concludes this: Both because of the way in which knowledge is transmitted in Ju|'hoan culture and because of the expectations of mystery and otherworldliness brought to Tsumkwe by outsiders, Tsumkwe does, in fact, become a place where truth abides by rules which may feel uncomfortable and strange to the uninitiated but allow for a maximum of flexibility and for ostensibly contradictory San images to exist simultaneously.

After having set up the space of the Pre-Archive, Chapter Five looks at different models of how to move through this space. I suggest the model of the Nomad, the Trickster, and the actor. These three notions present related, albeit slightly different ways of thinking about how, within the Pre-Archive, Ju|'hoansi travel between different San images. I use a film made by one of the workshop participants to demonstrate how the filmmaker can be both operating inside stereotypical Western images of San-ness and simultaneously project his own being San into the film.

An important point I make here, however, is the introduction of the concept of mastery. The skills to be a trickster, to flexibly traverse different spheres, has to be learned and mastered. It takes practise, skill, and a conscious effort to maneuver Tsumkwe's web of truths about identity and images in a way that is beneficial for the individual. To be a 'real San' in the eyes of as many people as possible, thus, is learned.

By making comparative use of the film set of *Vikings* throughout Chapter Four and Five, I show that neither the pre-archival space, nor the Trickster ways of moving through



it are unique to Ju|'hoansi. Arguments that make sense in the context of Tsumkwe equally work in other image-heavy environments. However, external expectations of and ideas about San and Tsumkwe have created a space where images perhaps have more power than in many other places.

However, Ju|'hoan sociality and unequal power relations between Ju|hoansi and outsiders play a role in how identity politics unfold against the backdrop of San images in Tsumkwe. In Chapter Six and Seven I look more closely at how interactions between non-San and Ju|'hoansi play out. In chapter Six I ask why organisations are often unsuccessful in establishing themselves permanently in Tsumkwe. While each year new organisations – big and small, governmental and non-governmental – try to effect what they consider positive change in Tsumkwe, only few of them manage to stay. Those who do stay successfully, shift their agenda significantly. Typically, the reason they leave – even though initially they may have been quite enthusiastic – comes down to frustration over things not working out the way they expected them to. At a certain point, their initial participants simply stop coming to workshops or participating meaningfully in the project.

I argue that what is happening here is that egalitarian Ju|'hoan sociality actually dominates Tsumkwe so much, that outsiders have to submit to it if they want to stay. This is a direct comment on the Kalahari Debate. Despite having been in exchange with colonial and capitalist systems, Tsumkwe, in some ways, maintains its Ju|'hoan values. 'Modernity' is in fact not a steam train that homogenises everything in its path; rather it can successfully be challenged by alternative value systems.

In chapter Seven, I look at a phenomenon which almost seems like the reverse of chapter Six. While Chapter Six looked at outsiders coming inside, Chapter Seven is interested in Ju|'hoansi leaving the inside and creating outside spaces to alleviate pressures experienced on the inside. The inside, it is worth noting here, is the pre-archival space where images, meaning and daily life are tightly interwoven. At its core, the chapter asks why the San seem to willingly participate in anti-San humour. I begin by making a case for why Ju|'hoansi, especially those Trickster persons which this thesis is concerned with, may sometimes find the combined pressure of egalitarian San sociality and outsiders expectations to be overwhelming. I then take a brief detour via a discussion of sand and the process of reading tracks. I argue that 'reading' tracks constitutes a moment of stepping outside where a totality of events can be conceived. I then begin talking about

defamatory humour. Using the example of Peter, the eccentric owner of a guesthouse in Grootfontein, I show how Ju|'hoansi happily participate in situations which explicitly make fun of them. The reasons for this are complicated. Ultimately, I argue, these situations constitute a form of play, in which caricatures of their identity are assumed as roles. This, ironically provides a temporary freedom from the real pressures that normally dominate their lives. However, this sort of play requires mastery of its rules. In this way, Chapter Seven is about ways to briefly step outside the constraints of normal life – whether those constraints are temporal, as in the case of reading tracks, or prescribed ways of being identified, as in the case of defamatory humour. Ju|'hoansi do not only inhabit San images, but they can also temporarily vacate them.

Just like – as my thesis has shown – San-ness exists not in absolute terms but only within the specific context in which it is performed, I would like this thesis to be understood to not make universal claims about the Ju|'hoansi but as an exploration of particular ethnographic moments. Like any work that deals with the ever changing, flexible, and ambiguous behaviour of humans, much more could be said and would be worth saying. One example is the extent to which I include negative gossip and lies. I heard it said on several occasion by Ju|'hoansi that the reason for negative chatter was simply that Ju|'hoansi “liked to complain”. While I include some instances of gossip I largely found this to go beyond the scope of my research. To gain a sophisticated understanding of gossip and complains was made difficult because of my positionality and questions to how much my presence encouraged or deterred those utterances. There were also ethical concerns with sharing this kind of information.

More importantly, I want to point to one limitation in particular. As the last chapter has begun to show, an in-depth analysis is needed of how the phenomenon discussed in this thesis affect the experience of gender difference. While both men and women may wield similar amounts of power in traditional Ju|'hoan life, daily tasks are relatively strictly divided along gender lines. To be sure, there are writings on gendered experience in Ju|'hoan society. The most poetic example is perhaps Megan Bieseke's *Women Like Meat*. In light of this thesis' findings it would be interesting to see how the pressures of both San sociality and expectations from outsiders impact gender dynamics. Are women as free to traverse pre-archival space as some of the male Ju|'hoansi?

Unfortunately, I do not have enough data to satisfyingly comment on this. The primary reason for that lies with my failure to seek out interaction with women particularly. This is not to say that I did not speak to women, but rather that it was eventually usually men who slid into the foreground of my ethnographic observation. This had two primary reasons. The first is that I generally made the experience that women were busier than men. Even in Nhoma, where the taking care of children was split evenly between men and women in general<sup>23</sup>, women were usually busy crushing seeds or nuts, making tea, coffee, and food, or crafting jewellery. Men, when they were not out hunting, even though they often assisted with cooking, were more often available to talk. This was also clear when it came to CEDU. The first group of potential participants did not include any women and it was raised by the group themselves that it would be advantageous to encourage women to join. While in the end there were three women who showed up to workshops most of the time, women, while interested, often felt they were too busy to fully participate.

The second reason was that I was primarily interested in Trickster figures, individuals who traversed the different spheres and had the social skills to adapt into whatever sphere they were inhabiting seamlessly. So, I was actually primarily interested in people who already had a web of pre-existing relationships with non-San. These people, whether tour guides, research assistants, or creative entrepreneurs most often turned out to be men. I cannot say whether this is a result of San sociality – I.e. that women would have been discouraged from associating with non-San outsiders – although I find this unlikely. In my experience, women are often village leaders, are almost over-represented in the conservancy's council, and women do certainly socialise with male visitors. I believe it is somewhat more likely that the reason for this gender imbalance is due to both historical factors and Western social values. Historically, interactions with San, if they were not being shot or enslaved, would often focus on their tracking skills, such as during the war for independence when San were hired as trackers. Reading tracks, being tied to hunting has traditionally been part of the male domain. It might also be possible to hypothesise that, because of their experience with hunting, men have a greater propensity to venture 'outside'. I would suspect, however, that the main reason might be underlying sexism by the people who come into Tsumkwe and seek out assistants or tour guides.

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<sup>23</sup> And thanks to Joseph erred on the side of being done more by men

Further research could shed light on these questions and provide concrete data about how women experience the varying pressures of Tsumkwe. Do women for instance value traditional aesthetic more than modern clothes, given that their general clothing choices seem to be more traditional than men's? Do women pursue similar or different strategies when they move between inside and outside than men? What is the experience of women entering relationships with non-San men? Do women experience their gender roles to be shifting?

I would like to point out that while this may seem like a large area to omit, the above questions have only become possible for me to ask as a result of the analytical work done in this thesis. It is the problematizing of categories such as 'real' and 'inauthentic', 'inside' and 'outside', 'traditional' and 'modern' that helps renders those questions meaningful.

## Part 2: Imagined Pasts, denied futures

Four years before my fieldwork I spent two weeks in Nhoma, visiting friends. This was before the fire had happened and the relationship with Arno was still decent. It was high tourist season and Christoph and I had set up camp a few hundred meters away from the village. Still, we could not help but notice the steady flow of tourists that washed through the village. Several times a day there would be performances of the Giraffe Dance or the Melon tossing games.

Thus, when we heard the sound of voices singing and rhythmic clapping at night, Christoph and I both assumed that some tourists were enjoying a particularly late performance. At first, we tried to go back to sleep. But when the singing did not stop, we decided we might as well go up to the village and see the performance ourselves. Christoph, grumpy at having been woken up, grabbed his video camera and his high power flashlight.

As we wandered up the hill we noticed that the circle was unusually large, almost as if the whole village was taking part. This was unusual in our experience. There was also no sign of any tourists around; the only source of light was the fire. As we got closer, Christoph's expression suddenly changed. He switched off his torch and put it in his pocket, together with the camera. We were quietly ushered into the circle by the sister of the 'old man' (who was still alive at the time).

It seemed like the entire village was indeed here for this dance. To accommodate this large number of people – at a guess around 70 – the setup had been slightly altered. In the large outer circle were most of the women and all the men who were not performing the dance, clapping and singing. Women were wrapped in blankets and men were wearing winter coats – it was a cold July night. In the middle circle were the healers: Seven men stepping rhythmically around the fire. All of them wore the traditional rattles strung around their legs, some of them were wearing jumpers. Four of the men I did not recognise, one was Joseph, one was Nani, and one was the 'old man' – he was blind and had trouble walking normally, but this did not stop him from dancing that night. In the inner-most circle, immediately around the small fire were a handful of women, apparently leading the singing and clapping. One of them was cradling a large bundle of blankets in her lap. Suddenly, the bundle emitted a pained scream. This was not the dissatisfied cry of a baby, it was a scream of pure agony. At this point, the blankets moved and revealed a child – a girl about four years old.

Immediately when we had entered the circle, Christoph and I felt we were intruding. I looked at him, asking whether we should leave, but he indicated that it was better we stayed. As I learned the next day, leaving would have suggested a disregard for the belief that in the case of dances during the night one must be by the fire to avoid being harmed by the spirits which are attracted by the act of healing.

We spent the rest of the night in the circle, singing and clapping continually, watching the dancers go into and out of trance, and bearing witness to the clearly immense suffering of the child until, after having sat down, at some point in the early morning I fell asleep.

The above was perhaps one of the most humbling experiences I ever made in Nyae Nyae. When this first occurred, I took it to affirm my notion that there were some dances that were 'real' and some that were not. As Chapter Four of this thesis shows, that

interpretation was guided by my own ethnocentric need to categorise encounters with indigenous others as either 'real' or 'fake'. For the people in question, these categories were meaningless. A dance, including this one, is simply what it is in the moment.

The next morning, after most of the village had recovered, we learned that the child had been suffering from fits that were increasingly getting worse. They had already taken the child to hospital but things had not improved. In an attempt to help, the village had sent for healers from another village who were able to do a few dances which the healers in Nhoma did not own themselves. All resources were pulled together and it was the responsibility of the entire village to help.

I included the above ethnographic account for two reasons. Firstly, I believe it serves to remove any lingering doubts that a fluid and flexible approach to San identity comes at the expense of profound communal social experiences. Secondly, it serves a brief argument I want to make about death in the next paragraph. Thirdly, this example of how a village pulled together in an effort to save a child's life, serves as an illustration of Ju|'hoansi culture being very much alive, despite claims to the contrary.

The men who died in the fire in Nhoma were buried officially – in caskets and with Christian crosses marking their grave. However, the little girl who had been the centre of the dance four years ago had no such grave. Her mother had taken her into the bush and buried her in an unmarked grave. As long as living memory would serve, that space would be avoided. Those who knew about it would not set up camp or do anything else there. One day, when the place had been forgotten, so would the girl be.

This way of simply letting the dead quietly fade into being forgotten is still not unusual for the San. In 'former times' some old people told me, the dead would simply be left in their hut and the camp abandoned until the bush had entirely reclaimed it. Of course, with villages now being static, and roaming space less available than probably in the past, this practice is no longer feasible. But the sentiment remains the same.

Along with other social phenomenon, such as the flexible changing of personal names, the taboo of calling someone's name in the night, the contextually shifting meaning of dances, and rejection of authenticity as an absolute concept, it speaks to an overall unwillingness to be pinned down, to be captured.

One of the core characteristics of how the San are talked about is that they are on the brink of dying out. This is evident in campaigns by, for example, *Survival International* in Botswana and a common feature in popular writings about the San but can be found as early as in the work of Bleek and Lloyd. Strong makes a similar argument in his book in a section fittingly entitled “A permanent vanishing act” (Strong, 2015, p. 72). To be sure, some of the Khoisan languages have indeed disappeared and the traditional practice of rock art died when the last rock artist was hanged. San people of all backgrounds and languages have historically been horribly mistreated, prosecuted and killed and in some areas their lives are still compromised by the government.

However, to claim that this unanimously applies to all San is fallacious and it conjures a misleading image. Firstly, the use of the term San as an absolute category is problematic here. As I show throughout this thesis, ‘San’ refers to an imagined and externally constructed category of people.

Secondly, there are many people who identify as Ju|’hoansi who are very much alive. While I have no exact data on the birth rate in Nyae Nyae, no one at any point raised the concern that there were not enough young people. To the contrary, especially old women would often comment on how much infant mortality had improved since they were young.

Presumably, when the San are being talked about as ‘about to die out’ what is meant is not the death of the actual human beings, but rather their way of life and their culture. There is a fear that San practices and values are slowly replaced by a globalised, ‘modern’ way of life. Of course, some of the young people in Nyae Nyae elect to move away into Namibia’s cities. Some do not even ever return. But at the same time, many young Ju|’hoansi chose, after typically meeting their partner in Tsumkwe, to move to one of the more remote villages. Further, as my thesis has shown, Ju|’hoan values continue to be upheld in Tsumkwe.

But why is the notion of cultural extinction so intrinsically bound up with the image of San-ness? Is it that an imminent disappearance of the San gives the images attached to them urgency and power? Is a moving target too difficult to capture? Casting our minds back to the introduction, does the danger of the image have to be contained? Is their state of being relicts of a long-gone age and simultaneously being very much alive and part of

a globalised world so unfathomable for us that their extinction would give us peace of mind?

A recent article by the Washington point illustrates well the point I want to make. The article is written by an anthropologist for a lay audience about James Suzman's most recent book *Affluence without Abundance*. I want to emphasise that the following comments are about the article, rather than Suzman's book itself. How the San are written about here at this intersection between anthropology and the general public is an interest case in point. The article is entitled *Bushmen who have little have much to teach us about living well* and was published on August 25<sup>th</sup> 2017. It begins like this:

Imagine a life in which you would need to work only 12 to 17 hours per week. Your society would be egalitarian, with respect to both gender and social class, and all resources would be shared and not hoarded. With all of your free time, you could devote yourself to leisure, to spending time with family and to creating a strong community. Is this a communist utopia, the subject of the latest financial self-help book or a sustainable reality? In "Affluence Without Abundance: The Disappearing World of the Bushmen," anthropologist James Suzman asks readers to consider what such a world might be like. And for an answer he presents the example of the Ju|'hoansi of southern Africa, a hunter-gatherer group whose numbers have dwindled radically but that still exists as a living reminder of a lifestyle that all humans embraced until the dawn of agriculture, roughly 12,000 years ago. (Newcomb, 2017)

The above lines resonate deeply with what I describe in Chapter Two and Four. The utopian picture painted here is closely related with a set of images that exist of the San. Specifically, it refers to Sahlin's notion of the original affluent society. It is of relatively little importance for my argument that a view of the traditional San life style as untroubled and easy can be debunked not only by academics who have challenged Sahlin's data, but more importantly by Ju|'hoansi who remember times of living off the Bush as problematic and precarious (see Chapter Four).

What is important is that the article makes San traditional life about the audience it addresses and frames this imagined way of life as something that relates to us.



While it pitches the San's way of life as a path to the future, the article frames the Ju|'hoansi themselves explicitly as a "living reminder" of the Stone Age. The article goes back and forth between praising the "poetry" with which Suzman writes about the San and summarising the "decline of the Ju|'hoansi". It finishes:

This fascinating glimpse into a disappearing way of life leads Suzman to reflect on our world today: a world where wealth and possessions are valued above all other pursuits. Suzman's account of the lives of Bushmen, past and present, offers plenty of fuel for thought. Their success was not based "on their ability to continuously colonize new lands, expand and grow into new spaces, or develop new technologies, but on the fact that they mastered the art of making a living where they were." Could we, he asks, learn from their example and "be satisfied with having fewer needs more easily met"? These are provocative and timely questions. (Newcomb, 2017)

It turns out, images of San-ness are actually all about 'us' – us in this case specifically meaning the readership of the Washington Post and generally meaning those who come to the San looking for answers. Evidence for San images actually being defined by whatever non-San are currently dealing with can be found throughout this thesis. In the above example, the San provide the solution to our irresponsible use of the planet's resources. In the 70's, Sahling original affluent society spoke to a desire to critique capitalism; for Lichtenstein, the San were defined by the absence of the hierarchical structures his being in Africa was shaped by (Chapter Two); tourists come to Tsumkwe looking for the sense of origin and spirituality they are missing (Chapter Four); NGOs come to Nyae Nyae thinking that what they have to offer is what the San lack (Chapter Six).

In this sense, images of the San are an exercise in self-definition, a reminder of who we are and who we might become by presenting us an opposite image. There is a certain poetry in this image, as there is with all powerful San images – whether mentioned in a Washington Post article or the body of work of Laurence Van der Post (Chapter Two).

This poetry consist of the balance between 'us' on the one hand and the San on the other; one imagined to be firmly rooted in the past, one projected into the future; the fact

that both meet in the present is precarious and precious. It gives the image urgency and power. While images of the San vary, looming extinction seems to be a core element of San image aesthetics. One might wonder whether an aesthetic that positions San in the past to inspire a European- American future inherently denies a future being imagined for the San; whether we have to take ownership of the San's imagined past to turn it into our future.

One might also wonder whether San images being a reflection of non-San is part of the reason why films made by Ju|'hoansi are treated with such resistance in Chapter Two. Is there a perceived sense that San image production requires a non-San observer as well as a San object?

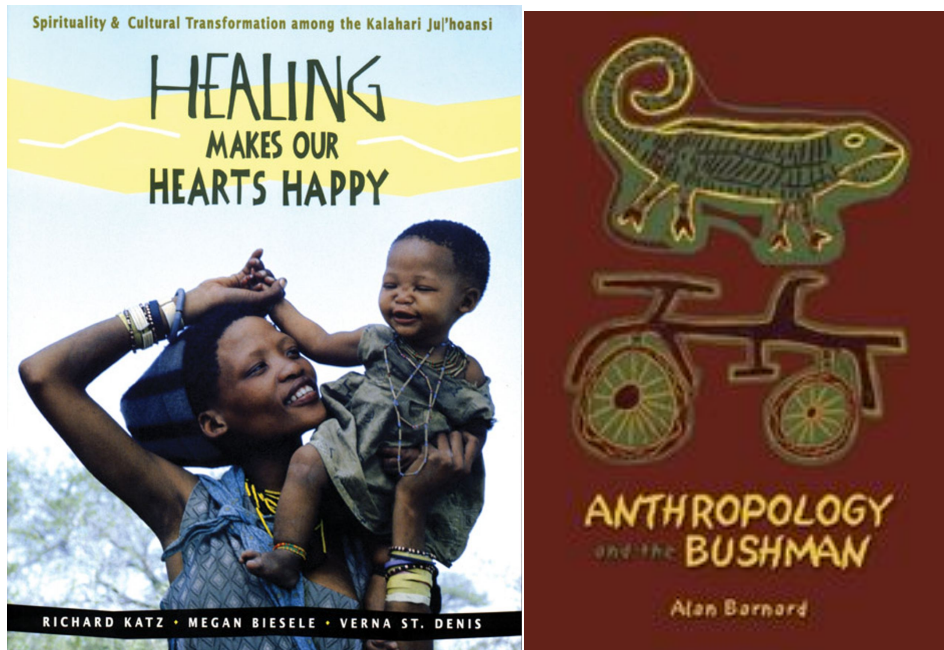
Joel's film about traditional Ju|'hoan life (Chapter Four) clearly shows this not to be the case. While he brings his own unique, arguably Ju|'hoan experience to the film, the film still makes use of images of San-ness. While San images may be reflections on non-San, they are still important elements of the social world of Tsumkwe and Nyae Nyae. Ju|'hoansi use, inhabit, and appropriate these images creatively.

I want to briefly return to Meek's argument how Shakespeare's endings evoke an imagined future. An important element of this format of having one of the characters allude to a future conversation that will set all things to rights, is that the conversation happens offstage (Meek, 2007, p. 250) . Throughout this thesis I have shown how Tsumkwe is a place of remoteness, both geographically but more importantly in the way it is imagined as a space of San-ness. As I explained in the introduction, we might think about this kind of remoteness in relation to what Crapanzano calls *the hinterland*, the space of the imagination. Remoteness is what the hinterland, Tsumkwe, and Shakespeare's 'offstage' have in common.

The conversations and futures that Shakespeare's characters allude to, Meek argues (2007, p. 261), may partly be a device to show that some stories are better left imagined than told. the San in Tsumkwe then, might be a device of the global imagination. Perhaps the issue with imagining a future for the San is that they are the medium of the imagination, rather than the subject.

In speaking to other scholars I have often been met with the sentiment that anthropologists should leave the San alone and that there is nothing else left to say about the San. I agree with the notion of 'letting go', as long as it is along the lines of what Megan

Biesele advocates when she says that “letting go does not mean ceasing to pay attention” (2003, p. 87). I do believe that we need to stop producing research which explicitly or implicitly pins the San to the lower end of a developmental or evolutionary spectrum. To that end, we might for instance stop presenting our research in visual ways that do not accidentally echo problematic images.



*Since the San do not have traditional written records, there is no indigenous San typeface or font. Why then then do publications on San often feature fonts which evoke images of primitivism or illiteracy?*

However, I do believe that the Ju|'hoansi are worth further study for their own sake. European-American scholars may not be the ideal candidates to carry out such research, but if we can find a way to break out of the categories to which we currently cling and understand the images we have of the San as imagined, the Ju|'hoansi might indeed have much to contribute to humanity's ongoing project of self-reflection.

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